CHRISTOPHER

BY

RICHARD PRYCE

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"There are open hours
When the God's will sallies free . . ."
Emerson.

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TO THE MEMORY OF MY MOTHER

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THE FIRST BOOK OF CHRISTOPHER

CHRISTOPHER

BOOK THE FIRST

CHAPTER I

WHEN Christopher was born nothing particular happened. A star may have danced, that is doubtful; that his mother cried is a fact beyond all dispute. Nothing was quite ready for him in a world into which he ushered himself somewhat unceremoniously. He was expected in London, where arrangements for his comfortable reception had been made by the excited ladies who were to become his aunts — rooms taken in convenient, perhaps inevitable, Ebury Street, a doctor warned, a crinolined nurse prepared at a moment's notice to move in, and await or take up her interesting duties. But an unaccountable little boy, he must needs take every one by surprise in mid-ocean. He had not even the excuse of a storm. The sea had never been calmer. He wanted to see the world? It was a beautiful world that night. There was a moon for lovers — a patch of gold on the sea for lovers to have followed together in exquisite fancy to the golden city whither it led. Lovers — married lovers, maybe — should have stood side by side to see it, where the lonely figure stood, pathetic in its weeds, and pathetic for something else which was vaguely apparent in the moonlight. It was the call of the beautiful world? Christopher all his life was to worship beauty. The wide eyes looking out over the shining sea filled with sudden tears — the first outward expression of a rush of feeling which was temporarily to prove overwhelming. Pity, then? Sympathy? Understanding? Christopher's

mother needed all three. I think myself that she called him.

He was what his mother's maid, Trimmer, pressed by untoward circumstance into all sorts of duties which were to have fallen to the lot of the crinolined lady waiting in London, — he was what Trimmer called a "posthumious" child. The word pleased and encouraged her. She spoke it frequently and with unction, dwelling lingeringly, for euphonious reasons, upon that syllable immediately before that with which she had embellished it. Only less important than Christopher himself was Trimmer that night. Trimmer indeed leapt to the occasion after the first few moments of natural dismay, and, discovering unsuspected deeps of motherly knowledge, held Christopher in such a way as satisfied not only the ship's doctor, but the stewardess, many times a mother herself, and even the Anglo-Indian ladies whose "experience" entitled them to emphatic if kindly opinions.

"A valuable life," said Trimmer, manipulating flannels in workmanlike manner: "a more than usually valuable life — *being* posthumious."

The Anglo-Indian ladies, from whom in her weeds and her sorrow Christopher's mother had kept somewhat apart on the voyage, nodded sympathetically. Yes, indeed. Poor young thing. It was terribly sad. With the stewardess they pronounced Christopher a Beautiful Baby — a statement which, as everybody knows (everybody at least who has ever seen the new-born young of man), can only have been relatively true.

Trimmer, however, said proudly that he had every right to be. They should have seen his father. There was a beautiful gentleman — cut off, too, in his prime, you might say, of life. It was 'eart-breaking. And look at her poor mistress, his widow. There were looks for you. It would have been surprising if the hero of the moment had not inherited his share of good looks.

Thus it was that Christopher entered the world. Of his

arrival upon the agitated scene he has naturally no knowledge at first-hand. Salt airs were the early breath of his little nostrils, salt airs with which were mingled all the subtle fragrances of the ship: scents of tar and rope and oil and wood, of metals even, with many fainter odours. The beat of the engines was in his unrecording ears, with creakings, trampings, flappings, and the pulsing rush of water. Trimmer, bending over him in adoration, told him a dozen times a day that he was Rocked in the Cradle of the Deep. His mother had whispered it to him with a pleased smile, but when Trimmer's "That's just what I say, 'm," told her that Trimmer had been too quick for her, she frowned a little, nor was she heard to say it again. She gave it freely to Trimmer — without frowning, that is — when the repetitions of it promised to be frequent.

"Rocked," sang Trimmer in a high soprano, — "*rocked* in the cradle of the deep," and rocked him in the cradle of her capable arms. She smiled to him nodding, and at herself shaking her head. To think, she said to herself, that she, Miss Trimmer, if you please, should have come joyfully to nursing — to nursing! she! — after her expensive lessons in hair-dressing, too! She knew instinctively the change which Christopher's advent was to make in her life. From the moment when . . . No matter! She only knew that she could n't stand aside now for any one. What she did n't know she would learn, and was ready for a fight if need be with Christopher's mother. Her arms had been the first . . . Could she surrender their burden to any other under the sun? Still, — in calmer moments, — a nurse!— when in her initial advertisement she had been able to proclaim herself not only an expert in hair-dressing, a good packer, but even a skilful dressmaker! A waste of talents if you considered! Finally, however, she always comforted herself with the reflection that if she did change her vocation and calling, as she intended to do, come what might, at least she had not married a native to become the mother of a speckled or piebald family, — which was the

dire fate her friends had prophesied for her, when affection for her young mistress induced her, against all advice, to accompany that lady to India.

There was no fight. Christopher's mother, convalescent in time and with her hair in two thick plaits — Trimmer's pride! — which hung one over each shoulder, was indeed only too glad. The doctor's admiration of Trimmer had been unbounded from the first. Her resource, her presence of mind, her surprising efficiency!

"What do you want with nurses?" he said. "The woman 's a born nurse. I never was more amazed. Her chignon —"

"Is n't it wonderful?" said Christopher's mother. "It's all on her head, too, — even the plait across the top, — which," she added doubtfully after a moment's pause, — "which I suppose I ought n't to allow her to wear."

"It hardly prepared me."

"She's a genius," said Mrs. Herrick. "I should never persuade her."

"Talk to her. Tell her I know some one whom I can thoroughly recommend."

"Do you?"

"Oh, there's always some one to be found. She won't like the thought of parting with the young gentleman."

"I'll sound her," said Christopher's mother.

But when it came to the point it was Trimmer who "sounded" Christopher's mother.

"I'm sure I hope it won't hurt him," said Trimmer suddenly out of the silence. She was at work in Mrs. Herrick's cabin, altering something of her mistress's — "altering back" (to be explicit) in her own significant phrase. Her needle flew to and fro through black materials, and her ornate head bobbed with the movements of her deft fingers.

Mrs. Herrick, who was occupied with her own thoughts, watched her for some moments without speaking. She was considering, indeed, how best to approach the perplex-

ing subject. The masterly composition of Trimmer's handsome chignon to which the doctor had alluded, to say nothing of the exquisite and becoming precision of her own two plaits, the reflection of which she contemplated from time to time in a looking-glass so placed that she could see herself, as for the first time she sat up, propped and stayed by many pillows, arrested again and again the words hesitating on her lips. It was preposterous to think that Trimmer would consent, — capable, thoughtful Trimmer, who had thought even of the looking-glass! Preposterous. She should have a nursery maid of course, — French or German as the case might be in the interests of Christopher's baby education, — but it was not to be expected that Trimmer with her gifts and qualifications would ever listen. She was a Superior Lady's-Maid. Lady's-Maid was written all over her.

"It's said to spoil their tempers," said Trimmer. She bent closer over her sewing and bit a thread.

"What spoils whose tempers?" said Mrs. Herrick.

Trimmer re-threaded her needle before answering. She always sewed without making a knot at the end of her cotton. The second stitch secured the first. Mrs. Herrick, who, on pain of making half a dozen such stitches futile, always had to make a knot, looked on interested, thoughts humming none the less at the back of her brain. There was something soothing in the rhythmic passage of the thread. Presently she really must rouse herself to speak — screw herself even to the point. The doctor said she was to do nothing but rest. She was n't exactly tired now that she was up. It was very pleasant to lean back amongst her pillows and listen to the passing of the thread through the silk. There was something that Trimmer paused now and then to do with the point of the needle. It was to tuck in any rough edge or loose end. How skilfully she did it!

"Babies," said Trimmer shortly. "Handing them on from one to another."

Mrs. Herrick heard the words when they were some moments old.

"I expect you'll be rather anxious, 'm," Trimmer proceeded, without looking up. "I should be, I know, if he was mine. It'd be a pity if he fretted. He's so plump."

Mrs. Herrick looked at Christopher — or at where Christopher lay. He himself was invisible amid the many filmy things which covered him.

"Perhaps she'll be cross to him, too. You never can tell when they're out of sight. I once saw a nurse shake a child in Kensington Gardens, till it was blue in the face. Nurses ought to have numbers like cabmen. If she'd had one, I'd have taken it, I know. As it was, all I could do was to give her a look. A look, I admit, 'm, I did give her. I've often wondered since whether the poor child died of convulsions."

"Trimmer, don't," implored Mrs. Herrick.

"It'd be bound to tell in the long run — tell upon the poor long-suffering child, I mean. *It* could n't tell. And a lady where I lived once —"

"If it's anything dreadful, don't tell me."

"It was only a whipping she saw, 'm — also in Kensington Gardens. A very favourite place for such things. *She* followed the nurse home and reported her, but, would you believe, 'm, got no thanks for her trouble. It passes compre'ension."

In those days even lady's-maids dropped an occasional *h*.

"You see, you never could be quite sure, could you? Of course" — Trimmer shook up the work in her lap and looked for her scissors — "of course I hope you'd be fortunate and find some one you really felt you could trust. But I can quite understand how anxious it'll make you."

"I lie awake at night thinking of it," said Christopher's mother. She looked at Trimmer, wondering whereto all this might tend. She could n't be going to propose that she, Trimmer . . . !

"I was thinking, 'm, how would it be if I —"

"You!" said Mrs. Herrick.

"For — for a bit, you know, 'm. Just till we could see how we got along."

"But could you —" began Mrs. Herrick, and did not mean to question Trimmer's ability, but her willingness. A deprecating "Could you bring yourself to think of such a thing?" would more aptly have expressed her thought.

Trimmer prepared to bristle. "Considering the emergency," she said, "we have n't done so badly."

"Oh, Trimmer," said Mrs. Herrick, "you 've done beautifully. I don't know what I should have done without you."

"Of course, I know," said Trimmer, "that the ladies have probably been looking for somebody for you in London."

"They won't engage any one till I've seen her. Trimmer, *could* you?" said Mrs. Herrick again. This time she meant "Would you?"

"I'm one of a large family," said Trimmer, mollified but still misunderstanding. "It is n't as if I had n't had to do with babies before this. There was always a baby of some sort at home."

"I don't mean *that*," cried Mrs. Herrick. "I meant — you . . . my *maid*, you know."

"Oh," said Trimmer, "I could easily make time to do the little I do for you. There is n't so very much, — except of course your hair, — for you 're not like some ladies who won't so much as lift a hand to help their petticoats over their heads, 'm. Why, as it is, you put on your own stockings, 'm, which indeed is not right. I've often and often asked myself, 'What am I here for?' — it's not right, 'm, it's not indeed." Trimmer shook her head. "So I'm sure we could manage. And when I think of his going from me to a stranger, and perhaps being shaken in Kensington Gardens —"

"Oh, Trimmer, would you . . ." said Christopher's mother.

Thus Trimmer reached the parting of the ways and

chose the lower path, which was yet, maybe, the higher, for Christopher. And thus to the making of Christopher was contributed Trimmer with all that Trimmer represented. Was he grateful for the sacrifice? He knew no more of it than of the salt air in his little nostrils, the sounds of the ship and the sea in his little ears, or the giant cradle itself in which he was said to be rocked. Many things that he knew not of went, however, to his making.

CHAPTER II

BUT presently everything made for wonder.

Long before that, of course, there came the day — he was in Ebury Street then — when he was seen and was said to "take notice." The saying may or may not have come before the seeing. Seraphic smiles thenceforward broke over his little face, for the magical appearing of which all sorts of causes were assigned by those who observed them. Everybody at such moments knew quite well, it seemed, what Christopher was thinking. He was thinking that he would like your watch (to put into his mouth, it was probable!) or the lamp — for the same purpose, perhaps — or the handle of your umbrella. Or it was because he knew you quite well — or his guardian angel had touched him ever so lightly with the tip of a sheltering wing. Trimmer, causes and reasons apart, said that she, bless you, could always make him smile. His mother said she could. His aunts said, No, *they* could. It became plain in time that almost any one could, for he was a healthy and so a happy little boy; but there were rivalries notwithstanding. None of these things mattered to Christopher. He "took notice," it is true, but he did n't know that he did till many, many months were past. Then things and people began to sort themselves out for him. Very early recollections in after years were of the crêpe upon his mother's dresses, of the hard beads on the bosom of a certain dress of Trimmer's, which even made a visible impression upon his little flushed cheeks when he went to sleep against them, and notably, though considerably later, it is to be hoped, in the interests of his little digestion, of the smell of his first dried fig — the smell of the whole box, rather, from which it was taken. The figs helped to scent

the cupboard where they were kept. Other wonderful things were kept there, too, each with its own mysterious fragrance,—such as candles, soap, sugar, tea in a canister, with pictures of Chinamen in pigtails upon it, jams in labelled pots, coffee-berries, spices; but whether or not the pleasant smell of the figs was dominant in the medley of agreeable essences which made up the atmosphere of the delectable cupboard, certain it is that the smell of figs thenceforward had the power of recalling all the rest to him. This cupboard was known as the *Storeroom at Granny Oxeter's*, and Granny Oxeter was known as Granny Oxeter to distinguish her from Christopher's other grandmother, Grandmamma Herrick — with whom it would yet have been impossible to confuse her, so abidingly separate were these two good ladies the one from the other. Even Christopher, an intrepid little boy in his early years, would not have dared to call his paternal grandmother "Granny." There was Granny Oxeter, but there was Grandmamma Herrick.

"Which is most my grandmother?" was a question put by Christopher much later on — when in fact he was about five years old.

"Darling, they're both your grandmothers. What a lucky little boy to have two."

"But which is *most?*" persisted Christopher. "I think Granny Oxeter is."

"So do I," said Christopher's mother — though she went back on this almost as soon as it was spoken. God forbid that she should put her own mother before the boy's father's. She had a tender conscience.

The scent of the first fig then at Granny Oxeter's took its important place amongst Christopher's young impressions. In after years he did not always trace fleeting sensations to their source, but, if he had been able to do so, he would have found that at a certain dinner party some thirty years later, the sudden interposition between him and his partner of a pair of long earrings, such as it had been

his grandmother's habit to wear, was directly attributable to the presence of a fig on his plate. His mind was forming itself with his body. Were the two really separate things? As he went through the process of a growing which marked itself outwardly in the outspanning and casting of young clothes, he was storing impressions as a bee stores honey.

The nursery as well as the storeroom cupboard contributed its quota. Everything contributed; night as well as day. There were misty early things of which one was the leaning over his cot of unfamiliar faces — which turned, upon solemn consideration, into the loving faces he knew best: his mother's, Trimmer's, one and another of the servants', his adoring Aunt Laura's or Aunt Catherine's. Or slumber compact of pleasant dreams would hold him, flushing his little cheeks for those who saw — when, on an instant, what? The falling of something in the nursery or of a star from heaven to crush him, and for a moment or an eternity, terrors unspeakable, things grown monstrous confronting him, weights insupportable holding him down, distances immeasurable between him and succour. Help for him! Oh help, mercy, pity for a little lost boy! — not these words, of course, nor any words; an inarticulate cry, the cry in the night. Then for him the hurried bobbing of an approaching light from the day nursery, where Trimmer sat reading or working, and, as often as not, his mother or even one of his aunts.

"What is it, my darling?"

Tears — he himself was conscious of them — on the flushed cheeks.

"What's the matter, my little boy? Tell Mother —" or Trimmer or Aunt Laura as the case might be. "Did something frighten you? What was it?"

Blinking, frightened eyes, for those who saw, and a puckered forehead. For himself, bewilderment, effort, albeit with comfort.

"I — thought —"

Strain unimaginable to express what he had thought!

"What, my precious? Can't you tell me? There, it's all right, my little boy. Don't try if it bothers you."

But he had to try, while Mother or Trimmer or Aunt Laura essayed to follow.

"Yes. Oh, enormous, was it? As big as — as the house? Bigger than the house? As the church? Like a great big orange? and quite, quite near, and dreadfully far too? How could that be? What is it, my darling?"

Mother or Trimmer or Aunt Laura had not understood. It *was* quite, quite near — "like when you put your nose against someone else's" (Christopher's "grammar," not his mother's!) "and look into their eyes" — and it *was* far off, too. And it was bigger than the church — bigger than anything Christopher had ever seen, only he could n't think of anything bigger than the church — and heavier than the world or Granny Oxeter's great big Bible, which only Granny Oxeter's Robert with the gold buttons could lift. Why could n't Mother or Trimmer or Aunt Laura understand?

But look, said the comforting voice, it was quite gone now, whatever it was. He was safe in his cot with the brass rails, and there were the pictures of Cinderella and Little Red Riding Hood and the Three Bears. And loving arms were round him and the recollection of his terrors fading and his gulping sobs ceasing. Mother (it was his mother on one particular occasion which stood out somehow from the rest, and not Trimmer, who was perhaps at her supper when her mistress had stolen up to see him, nor his Aunt Laura who for the same purpose was always slipping away from the room downstairs which was known as the Droing-room) — Mother would stay with him till he was asleep again. Yes, promise! Till he was quite asleep. And she would sing to him. Yes, first, "A little ship was on the sea, It was a pretty sight," and then, "Lord Lovel and Lady Ancebel." Yes, the whole of it — even if he was asleep before the last verse. . . .

A voice singing softly — singing, as it were, under its breath and for Christopher alone — was heard then in the night nursery, chasing fears away, and spreading a gentle calm that lapped him round like tiny waves of the sea.

"'Oh that 's a long time, Lord Lovel,' she said,
'To leave a fair lady alone —'"

The voice faltered. Christopher felt the hand removed from his head for a moment.

"Mummy."

"Yes, darling."

"I'm not asleep — quite."

The hand went back. It held something then which had been fumbled for without any actual break in the singing. Christopher with eyes tight closed wondered why. But the handkerchief seemed like part of the hand and he felt quite safe and sighed contentedly.

"'And so it is, Lady Ancebel,
But I must needs be going.'"

The voice, threading the verses on a slender string of melody, grew further and further off. Christopher heard about the milk-white steed, and "Adown, adown, adown, adown," and was conscious of the approach of the line which to Mrs. Herrick always seemed to have too many feet. At "a branch of sweet-briar," he tried, with a vague intention of announcing that he was still awake, to say "Mummy" once more, but the word would not come, and the last verse of all mingled itself with new and happy dreams.

"They grew till they grew to the top of the church,
And when they could grow no higher,
They grew into a true lover's knot,
And so they were joined together."

The singer's head sank on to the brass rail of the cot, and if Christopher had not then been far away in the land of happy dreams, he must have added another impression to his store.

Morning, and the terrors of the night forgotten, the sun would pour in through chinks at the nursery window. A host of impressions then, a mind active beyond control. Might he get up now? He was to be good and go to sleep again. Now might he get up? Well, *now* might he?

"No, master Christopher. Not yet, there's a dear. Your mamma won't be ready for you for hours." Such a drowsy voice, Trimmer's in the morning! "Hours and hours. Try to sleep a little longer."

Christopher would try — or rather he would not try, but would lie still looking at the pattern on the wall paper. There were stiff flowers upon it and, at regular intervals, a bird flying after a butterfly. Christopher wondered if the butterfly was ever caught. It was always at exactly the same distance from the bird — except in one place, where a join in the paper brought six butterflies quite near to six birds. But even here not one butterfly was caught.

It was often "quite light" in the morning when Christopher woke, because — in what were known as furnished houses — curtains did not always fit the windows exactly, but left gaps at each side through which the sun streamed in wonderful beams, in which floated all sorts of things. Christopher could not see the marvellous dance of the motes from his little bed, but he had seen it and he knew exactly what it was like — how they turned and twisted and became silver or gold for a moment as the light struck them, or blue or red or green, and how they chased each other or got out of each other's way, or rose or fell, and how, if you watched one as you watch a snowflake, it was certain to roll out of the sunbeam altogether and disappear.

When would Trimmer let him get up? Out of doors everything was awake. There were always nice noises to be heard in the morning. The people next door kept poultry, and one or another of the hens was generally clucking. That meant that she had laid an egg for somebody's breakfast. She clucked so much sometimes that Christopher was quite sure she must have laid two — perhaps more.

Perhaps he would have an egg for his breakfast himself. He had a whole egg now, and either dipped long strips of bread-and-butter into it, or had it broken up into a cup, which was equally delicious. He could remember the time when, at grown-up breakfast at Granny Oxeter's, he used to be given the top of one for a treat.

"Can I have the top of your egg, Granny Oxeter?"

"Darling, s-s-h," from his mother to him; and, to his grandmother, "You must n't let him bother you."

Granny Oxeter always let him bother her — only she said he did n't bother her. She was certainly, as he came to think, more his grandmother than Grandmamma Herrick, who, even when he was quite good (and hardly fidgeting at all), used somehow — by looking in his direction over her spectacles, it is probable — to let it be felt that he did.

"Christopher," Grandmamma Herrick would say, "would you like a penny?"

"Yes, please."

"Then see if you can keep perfectly still for five minutes. Without opening your lips, remember. Without moving your little finger."

Well, you had to find out when the five minutes were up. That was why you had to say "Now is it five?" and "Now is it?" at intervals. Would it ever be? And when at last it really was time and you were near the bursting point, from holding your breath, perhaps, in the frenzied effort of keeping still, you were told you had spoken.

Oh, not really spoken, only asked!

And you had moved.

"But not my little finger, only" — you were near to protestant tears then — "only my foot."

A desperately hardly earned penny, you see, when you got it; so that once, greatly daring, in answer to his grandmother's question Christopher said boldly, "Not — not if I've got to earn it, please," — and most surprisingly got sixpence! His first lesson in the efficacy of grasping your nettle.

Granny Oxeter's pennies, on the other hand, never had to be worked for. They were new, moreover ("gold"!), and just given to you for nothing. They came from a little knitted bag shaped like a jug, which lived in a drawer in a writing-table in Granny Oxeter's room. An enchanting ceremony, the unearthing of the penny! First, Granny Oxeter's keys had to be found, and they lived in a little basket which held letters and string. Then one particular bunch had to be chosen out of several to the accompaniment of a jingling that was music to excited young ears. Not that one, not that, nor that. This — stay! no, those were the keys of her wardrobe. Here we were. Here we were at last. Then one particular key on that particular bunch. Christopher's excitement could scarcely contain itself while the key was being fitted to the lock. Click! Then the wonderful thing of all: the rolling up of the top of the desk which, disappearing as it did, seemed to be swallowed by the desk itself. This part of the proceedings had always to be repeated for Christopher's benefit.

"Let me, Granny Oxeter," and Granny Oxeter always "let" Christopher.

Then the opening of the little drawer which fitted so closely that, when you closed it, it sent out a little puff of wind. Then the knitted jug. Then in your eager little hands the gold penny. Christopher could remember the day when he was asked which he would rather have, a shilling or the penny, and chose the penny for its size and its shining. Never were such pennies as came from the knitted jug at Granny Oxeter's.

Impressions! Impressions! Each one indelible and fitting into its place, there to lie till this or that should call for it and turn it into a memory or memories. Christopher's mind was itself a desk and a storeroom.

There were wonderful walks. There were shoppings. There were people called visitors, to whom, in very early doings, he was told to give his right hand. At Cheltenham,

where Granny Oxeter lived, and the first few years of his life were spent, some of these people came in Bath-chairs. There was a ritual for Bath-chairs. The Bath-chairman drew the chair up to the doorstep and then turned the "handle" round, to prevent the chair from running away. After doing this and receiving directions he rang the bell. While he was waiting for the door to be opened, the visitor gave him more directions. If the answer was, "Not at Home," an eager or a disappointed card-case came into requisition; and then the chairman, having turned the "handle" round again and walked backwards for a few steps, would resume his natural position and draw the Bath-chair out of sight. If, on the other hand, his mother was at home and the visitor "got in," the Bath-chairman, when the door had closed behind his employer, drew a pipe from his pocket and seated himself on the "floor" of the chair, there to await her return.

The ritual was always the same. Christopher, an interested little boy, would watch all this when he could from behind the curtains of the dining-room window, or any other coign of vantage.

He would be sent for or not, as the case might be, to give his right hand and submit perhaps to being kissed, which he hated. The soft warm smell of sealskin was intimately associated with visitors.

Life was absorbing. Everything that caught Christopher's attention held it.

"Come along, Master Christopher," Trimmer would say a dozen times in the course of any walk.

But Christopher had to see more of whatever it was that enchained him — the house-painter plying his flat brush, or the chairs-to-mend man interlacing his strips of split cane to a familiar pattern, or the knife-grinder striking sparks from his wheel. Everything made for wonder. Like the Bath-chairman, Christopher often walked backwards.

CHAPTER III

PRESENTLY the scene shifted from Cheltenham, from England even, and at Boulogne where things were yet more wonderful, though there were still Bath-chairs and Bath-chairmen, house-painters and knife-grinders, Christopher found himself storing French impressions for English.

The circumstances which led to the change were not at the time very clear to him. They were associated in his mind with a period of red eyes in the family. From the morning when, out of the blue, shot his Aunt Laura with white lips, a pocket handkerchief, and an open letter, to blanch the face of his mother, everybody for a time had a tendency to tears. People wept more readily in those days, Christopher came to think, — jumped to dire conclusions, imagined the worst, permitted if indeed they did not encourage scenes. Granny Oxeter, however, so much he gathered before he was sent out of the room, was "ruined," whatever that might mean. It drew a cry from his mother, who, as she clasped her hands, dropped the "Mavor's Spelling" from which (at "The Cat ate the Rat") she was teaching him to read, "pointing" as she did so, with one of her knitting-needles. The needle travelled patiently along the line as Christopher read or palpably guessed.

"You're guessing, Christopher."

"No, I'm not."

"Then what comes before D?"

"G."

"Wrong."

"M — for mouse."

"You're not attending."

Christopher upon this occasion had only reversed the order of the letters once — just reversed them, to the

effect of making the Rat eat the Cat, which his mother, with her rare but not infrequent laugh, was in the act of pointing out to be impossible, when his Aunt Laura had burst in unannounced.

"Laura, dear!" said his mother, alarmed as she saw her, "Laura, dear . . ."

"Look at this. He's absconded — disappeared. Mr. Grindle. We're — poor Mamma's ruined!"

His mother's cry, together with the fall of the "Mavor," sent Christopher's heart to his mouth, where, however, in the interest and excitement of the moment, it did not remain long. He observed (somehow to his satisfaction) that his Aunt Laura's hat was quite on one side and that she had buttoned her out-of-door jacket up "wrong" — the whole way up. A tidy little boy even at a crisis, he pointed these things out, but neither his aunt nor his mother heeded him.

"Ruined!" said his mother.

"Ruined," said his Aunt Laura. "He's bolted. No one knows where. It's been going on for years, it seems. They — what a scoundrel! Poor Mamma. Oh — " she broke off. "Christopher, dear! I ought n't — I — my dear, I did n't *see* you!"

She looked significantly at her sister, and applied herself to her pocket handkerchief.

"Run away, darling," said Christopher's mother.

Christopher began to beg to be allowed to stay. He would be quite quiet — not any trouble. He did want to know so much who Mr. Grindle was and why he had bolted But his mother was firm, and, howsoever reluctantly, he had to go. At the door he was called back — at his aunt's suggestion, he fancied — to be told not to say anything of what he had heard to anybody. So he could n't even tell Trimmer. Impossible with a whirling brain to keep absolute silence. He had at least to ask what the word meant.

"What does it mean, Trimmer, when some one is ruined?"

"Ruined?" said Trimmer. "How do you mean?"

"When somebody 's ruined," said Christopher again. How to express it without naming his grandmother! "When — when a lady is *ruined*."

Trimmer straightened her back.

"Good gracious, Master Christopher! I can't think where you have heard such words."

That was the beginning of the time of red eyes. There was a coming and a going between the two houses. There were better days and worse days. Things were not as bad as had been feared at first. Things were as bad as they could be. There were family discussions, from which, to his disgust, Christopher was rigorously excluded. He managed to hear a word here and there all the same. However careful they were to send him out of the room he heard some things. He was very sharp, you see. He was also a Little Pitcher. Some one, called Poor Mr. Aggot, was doing all in his power to save the ship. What ship? Poor Mr. Aggot, as we may guess, if Christopher could n't, was the absconding Mr. Grindle's partner. He, it appeared, had been left to bear the "brunt" of a Very Bad Business.

"What's Brunt?" asked Christopher, half expecting (half hoping even) to hear that it too came under the head of Such Words.

Trimmer of course was not long kept in ignorance of what it was that had happened. She contributed willingly her share of red eyes; willingly — with alacrity even. Mrs. Herrick's fortunes were involved in those of her mother, and in the very dark days, when least seemed likely to be saved out of the wreck, Trimmer in the rôle of confidant and adviser was comfort unspeakable.

"We shall all manage, 'm, you 'll see, and if it was to come to one servant —"

"Oh, Trimmer," said Christopher's mother.

"I would," said Trimmer, with streaming eyes, "wages or no wages."

It was not, however, as bad as all that. It amounted to no

more in the end than the giving up on the part of Granny Oxeter of the big house at Cheltenham with its expensive staff of servants, in exchange for comparative retirement, and retrenchment only more or less positive, at Boulogne. Brussels was mooted, Bruges discussed, Boulogne chosen. Thither Mrs. Herrick followed her mother and sisters.

"Afford," none the less, was a word which, in connection with a negation, took its place amongst household words in the vocabularies of the two families. Christopher had not so many toys or even (quite) so many pennies, and Granny Oxeter had no longer any Roberts with gold buttons to answer bells and to lift the big Bible. These things did not matter. What "mattered" was the enchantment of the new life. New sights, new sounds, and the sea! Values relatively far more important in the sentimental education of impressionable Christopher.

This education proceeded. It had nothing to do with lessons, and was indeed unending. It took in everything that happened, everything there was — more than was "dreamed of" in his own or any one else's "philosophy." Earth and sky and sea had a part in it, nature animate and inanimate, with good and evil too, various kinds of food, wholesome and unwholesome, a great deal of pleasure, and something, it is to be supposed, of pain. Undecipherable many of the writings upon the page so lately blank — crossed and recrossed as his Aunt Laura's economical letters to England.

Enthralling, the new life! Christopher went from one delight to the next. Trimmer's "Come along, Master Christopher" pointed the crowded hours. A companion indulgent enough in other respects, she lacked the capacity to loiter. Christopher wondered at any one who could even want to move on when men were mending the road — an operation he himself would have watched for ever. Did n't grown-up people ever want to see how things were done? Were the sight and sound of the man's soft digging in the sand with a short-handled tool which was half

hammer, half pickaxe, nothing to them? Look! he had made the hole now and was lifting the big cube of stone — which in shape and size reminded Christopher of a loaf of English household bread. He was tossing it now to get it into position to fit squarely with its fellows — had thrown it deftly into the place he had prepared for it, and, with the "hammer end" of his implement, was giving it the ringing blows which were somehow as music in Christopher's ears. Trimmer could withstand even this. When she had started to walk to the sands or the Ramparts or what the English nurses all called the Petty Zarb or the Petty Zarber, she wanted to get there, though skies fell (if it was not in rain that they fell!) or roads were mended to distraction! She said, "Come along, Master Christopher," even when floury half-naked men at the baker's took in the long split sweet-smelling logs for the fires which heated their ovens. The wood, one side of it still with its bark, the other lined, splintery, and showing here and there a warm brown knot in the mellow grain, was thrown lengthways down through the opening of the cellar door to the bare arms ready to receive it. Christopher could understand being told to stand back, because, if he stood too near the edge, he would be in danger of falling himself with the wood into the yawning cellar, but — not to want to see! It was the same with the iron "fountains" in the streets. Trimmer never wanted to see them splash. The same with the enthralling French gutters, into which smelly soapy water was always being emptied for his delight. He was not encouraged to watch the empty claws of a crab, or bits of paper, or potato-peel, speeding on a soapy flood down the Grande Rue, or the Rue des Vieillards, to the first fragrant sink gaping to receive them. In after years any sudden rush of water recalled to Christopher the engrossing gutters of Boulogne, with the blue of the racing flood, and the look of the gaping sinks.

"Faugh!" said English Trimmer. "Come along, Master Christopher."

It was not till many years after that he realised the truth, and even then he did not gauge it completely. Trimmer did not see what he saw; his mother did not, or saw but in part; most people did not. It took all his school days to teach him that. It took his early manhood to tell him why.

Is the bird-shop still on the Port where the parrots screeched, and the canaries sang and flew from perch to wire, from wire to perch or floor or swing, while the lovebirds kissed and the avadavats huddled together twenty in a row? Christopher made friends with a dog or two in a cage and played with many imprisoned kittens. It was here perhaps that Trimmer had longest to wait on the daily walk to the sands. Oh, do stop a minute, Trimmer! Well, well, well! Bless the boy. What was it now? On a memorable day "it" came to a head. Might he have something alive of his own? A puppy? Impossible. A bird, then? Come along, Master Christopher. Might he? Why might n't he? Might he? It chanced, for his argument, that there was an empty bird-cage in the furnished house which his mother had taken. Just to put into that. Why might n't he? Why, after all, something in Trimmer's aspect seemed suddenly to say, why, after all, might n't he? He might, then! It was a comparatively early franc of his treasured French money which bought him his linnet. He carried it home in excitement unspeakable and — of all things! — a paper bag! His heart misgiving him by reason of the captive's crackly and rustling flutterings, he was ineffably comforted to learn — not only from Trimmer at the time, but also from his all-wise mother afterwards — that to have yielded to a self-sacrificing impulse, which prompted him there and then to let it go, instead of consigning it to the cage for which it had been bought, would have availed the poor thing nothing. Why? The other birds would only have pecked it to pieces. Why would they? Neither Christopher's mother nor Trimmer could tell him. Their answer was suspiciously like, "Because

they would." But Christopher absolved was Christopher satisfied. Contented Christopher, then, with a caged bird and a clear conscience! Contented Trimmer, who maybe thought thus to have drawn the fangs of the bird-shop. If Trimmer, however, who upon her own responsibility had sanctioned a purchase the trouble and care of which must necessarily fall upon herself, — if Trimmer, I say, really had any such hope, she did not know little boys or know Christopher. The bird-shop not only remained the bird-shop, but became the Bird-Shop where Christopher had Bought his Linnet.

The sun shone and the breezes blew and the rain fell upon these early days, while everywhere, to stir the young imagination, was the smell of the sea. It met you in the breeze that set everything flapping. Drying nets, brown as autumn leaves, held it in essence. Sou'westers in a shop-window, yellow oilskin coats, sea-boots, or pulleys, ropes, sail-cloth, fishing-tackle, suggested it even in the upper town. Beyond the Port were mysterious regions more sea-fraught still — dim places comprehensively known as Back Streets, never, for fear of something called Infection, to be explored, seldom entered, — never, except on the dullest outskirts, when, in full summer, the sun on the Port made the shade of them grateful to the discreet and unenterprising guardians of the young, who, else, had kept them rigorously upon an Index of their own compiling. Somewhere in this mysterious region, and in regions more mysterious still, lived the fishing community — the comely men with ruddy faces and rings in their ears, the lithe and buxom women, the clip-clap of whose wooden shoes upon the pavement filled the whole of the lower town with undying music.

A little boy with eyes, ears, and nostrils could not be dull. Reading was still without tears, and Mrs. Herrick's knitting-needle traced its appointed course daily across the page of "Mavor," with occasional excursions to those of

a book in a blue cover paradoxically called the His-to-ry of the Rob-ins in Words of One Syl-la-ble, but the time so spent was more grudged than at Cheltenham. It was difficult to "attend" when he knew that while he wasted the precious moments indoors, the black-funnelled London boat was being unloaded in the harbour, where a crane was hoisting great bales on to the quay — perhaps even horses! Oh, when it was horses! No " Come along, Master Christopher" would get Master Christopher then! Even superior Trimmer had to be interested. Down dipped the chain paid out from the "reel" in the little black house. The great hook was adjusted, gripped . . . rattle, rattle, rattle, in the little black house, and the horse-box with its terrified occupant was rising, rising, poised: a pause then; click-click, and the little black house was turning on its oiled pivot, while its freight, snorting, trembling, panic-stricken, swung out in mid-air; another pause; click, rattle, rattle, rattle, and horse-box and horse were ashore! Many a remonstrant "You're not attending, Christopher" was atrributable to the seduction of memories of such supreme happenings as these. Or the cry of the shrimp-sellers would be heard under the window. Was it possible to attend to the Cat and the Rat when Amélie downstairs, like the Betty or Molly of one of Wheatley's "Cries of London," seven of which surprisingly hung in the "furnished" French dining-room, was perhaps even then going to the door with a dish or a bowl in one hand and money in the other to buy? For amongst the shrimps would be baby fish to enchant him — little plaice the size of a five-franc piece, little crabs the size of anything at all from a pin's head to an Albert biscuit, tiny soles, and Heaven knows what else of live wonder for that salt-and-water mortuary known as his Aquarium. Or perhaps it was the mackerel cry which came to him from the street, gratefully to disturb him, or the pleasant sing-song cry of the coal, or only maybe fugitive thoughts of the sea and the sun and the quays and the gutters.

CHAPTER IV

WONDERFUL things happened at Boulogne: twice a year a fair with merry-go-rounds, and fat ladies, and a cow with an arm, and a child with four legs, and Tombolas, and gingerbread, and everything else of horror and delight — of this and of these, later; once a year the Carnival when Christopher himself was allowed to wear a mask — to add for all time (and nothing else, perhaps) the hot cardboardy smell of masks to his enthralling collection of impressions; once a year the festival of Saint Nicolas, the French Santa Claus; and, once for all, the War. Then for a time went everything else to the wall, and Christopher was filled with martial ardour.

The town was filled with excitement. Rumour danced to fact. It was to be; it was not to be. Was it to be? It was; and was presently war in being. The "Marseillaise" was in the air. Workmen sang it, clerks, students, schoolboys. Christopher sang it drumming on the panes of the nursery window, and discarded his most treasured toys for soldiers.

"Aux armes, citoyens!
Formez vos bataillons!
Marchons, marchons —"

"You'll break the window, Master Christopher." But even Trimmer hummed it and went so far upon occasion as to wrestle with the words. "Le jour de glwore est arrivay." The "Marseillaise" for "Rocked in the cradle of the deep"!

"Gloire, Trimmer, not glwore."

"Glwah," amended Trimmer. "Le jour de glwah."

"It is n't quite," said Christopher. "Can't you hear the difference? Listen when I say it:—gloire."

But Trimmer had seen it spelt.

"Well, it is n't glwore," said Christopher, "and it is n't *glaw* either — yes, you did. You said, *Le jour de glaw* (it is n't contradictory when you're teaching a person) — and, besides, ask mother."

Mrs. Herrick did not sing it much. It was a revolutionary song, she said. The song of the guillotine really. But the melody held her for all that. She sang it less as time went on and events took their course. Had the day of glory really come — for France? Had it, when presently flimsy "Dépêches" were yelled in the streets, and the people ran out to buy news of victories which had not taken place? Would Christopher's father have sung it? There were French people even who shook their heads.

But it was a time for little boys to feel martial. Christopher longed for the Carnival, that he might dress up as a soldier — a Zouave for choice. As he walked beside his mother or Trimmer on the Ramparts he defended Boulogne against the Prussians. It was the old town of course which must be besieged — what else use the Ramparts? — and in imagination (the Ramparts being there for nothing else), he pushed the scalling Prussians from their walls — walls on which unless held firmly by his mother's or Trimmer's hand he was forbidden even to think of walking.

"If you slipped you would be dashed to pieces."

"How many pieces?"

"A thousand," said Christopher's mother.

So for every Prussian he pushed from them there lay a thousand pieces of Prussian on the sloping gardens below. Christopher sang the "Marseillaise," but — a tidy little boy, as we know — paused in his slaughter.

Still, ramparts were ramparts and there were "miles" of them — the whole of the old town within; the Cathedral, streets, squares. Defences and things to defend. Mysterious stone stairs, with shining iron rails worn to slipperiness by countless hands living and dead, led to silent places where quite a different life was lived from that of the busy town outside. A priest would pass with his

book; many little old women in black. Seclusion, secrecy, mystery, everywhere. What went on behind the shuttered windows and the whitewashed walls? A house or two on the inner side was almost built into the Ramparts themselves. There were suggestions of hidden gardens. Lilacs in the spring would peep over the wall. Some one would pass in or out with a key. There were monasteries here and convents. Nuns with moving lips sped silently through sheltered streets. There were old men with coughs and snuff. A sunny day would bring strange people from strange lairs. The mystery of the Haute Ville assumed an added glamour for the coming of the war — which (so Christopher had settled) was to threaten if not to disturb it. He was ready to fight.

More ready still when, to his excitement and delight, soldiers were actually "billeted" upon his very mother, in the house with the green shutters in the Rue Gil Blas off the Grande Rue.

It was December then and bitterly cold. The Mobiles — young men of all classes, countrymen speaking the patois of their department, young men from desks and counters, stables, factories, workshops — were drawn up on the Esplanade where the fairs were held, and waited their orders. In their unaccustomed surroundings they looked astray, strange, alert, interested, apprehensive, indifferent, according to circumstance and individual temperament; but all, as they waited in a biting wind, looked chilled to the blood or the bone. They stamped their feet to get warmth into them, or swung their arms, or blew on their fingers; and waited. The townspeople came up to see them — the householders who would be called upon to take them in or pay for their lodging; and they waited. Officials inspected them; and they waited. Those who had money bought food. Those who had not went without; all waited. Faces grew pinched, teeth chattered. There were men in thin coats; in blouses. You were cold in a thin coat or a blouse that weather. It was the time of year when the

heavily clad women in the market, used to all weathers, sat over little pans of charcoal.

"Poor things," murmured Christopher's mother, tears in her gentle eyes.

"It is n't 'ardly 'uman," Trimmer said — "keeping them standing about in the cold. A blazing fire and a good hot cup of coffee, that's what they want. War or no war, 'm, I've hardly patience."

"I wonder whether it would be safe," said Christopher's mother. She had meant to pay her men off, but when, in the comfort of her own sealskin, she saw them shiver, her tender heart misgave her.

Christopher with glowing cheeks was running about amongst them, and coming back to his mother every few minutes to pull her sleeve and impart information to her.

"That one's a postman," he said, — "a *facteur*. I asked him. He comes from the country — oh, a long way off, he said; and that one trying to button his coat 's name is Pierre Something. Oh, are n't his hands red? I know what it feels like when you can't button things 'cause your fingers bend the other way, and then it's all tingling-wingling and it does hurt. May Trimmer do it for him? She can always button mine. Oh, do lend him Trimmer."

The young man caught Mrs. Herrick's eye and smiled. "Il est gentil, le p'tit m'sieur."

He was a boy. The country had tanned him. The brown of autumn woods was in his hair and his eyes, something of the gold of cornfields in his skin.

"Where do you come from?" Mrs. Herrick asked him.

"From Adeville, madame." He named his home. "My father has a farm. Madame will perceive that I drew the unlucky number."

"Ah, you will go back," Christopher heard his mother say with a catch in her voice, — "who knows, perhaps covered with glory."

"If the good God will, madame."

It was not, she believed, how he would have expressed himself at any other time, nor at any other would she have been moved to say, as she heard herself saying: "Your mother is praying for you, I know — as I in her case should be praying for my boy."

She put her hand on Christopher's head and Christopher, looking up, saw that she was crying.

The day went on. The men hung about in groups, talking or silent. Now and then one or another would walk away, his hands in his pockets, and stamp his feet on the hard ground. He would come back to the group from which he had moved, or join another, perhaps, at the outskirts. Heads would be turned enquiringly. Any news? No news. Sometimes a movement would animate the whole crowd as a breeze over a cornfield sways the whole of it in one direction. The patience was extraordinary. Here and there one more independent than the rest was heard to complain, but for the most part there was a passive acquiescence in what was happening or not happening, in what the days might or might not bring forth. *A la guerre comme à la guerre*, and no one knew precisely what the fact of war entailed or implied.

The spectators came and went. Granny Oxeter in her Bath-chair was there for a time with Christopher's Aunt Laura; and at one moment or another most of the English community. Here were Lord and Lady Colsonstown, retrenchers from Ireland; Mr. and Lady Sophia Witson, abroad pending a perpetual settlement of their affairs; the Dowager Lady Stoke-Pogis, rich at Boulogne on her jointure; Admiral the Honourable James Briscoe, poor anywhere on his pension; General Allingham; the Dempseys, two rich elderly widows, sisters-in-law, who lived together and "entertained," and this one and that of the Things and the What 's-their-names to whom Christopher had to give his right hand, and whom he thought of instinctively and comprehensively as Visitors. There were others also — a Lady Dorinda Britton who had a suite of rooms perman-

ently at the big hotel in the Rue Blanche and did n't wish to be called upon, and a Mrs. St. Jemison who could n't be. All these went up the Esplanade to look at the Mobiles who were to be billeted on the town.

Lord Colsonstown said there was mismanagement somewhere.

Mr. Witson, who wore late whiskers with an early eyeglass, and all whose *th*'s were *f*'s or *v*'s, said he should fink so too. Vere was no doubt about vat. Mrs. Dempsey and Mrs. Dempsey were in a little flutter of excitement. There had never in their time been such a thing heard of as soldiers billeted on the English residents. One Mrs. Dempsey began to say how long that was, and was only just saved from committing herself to dates by a timely nudge from the other. There were penalties attached to the pride of being a leader and one of the "oldest" residents.

"Well, well," said Christopher's grandmother, "it won't hurt us."

"Are you going to take them in," said the Dempseys, — "soldiers?"

"Certainly," said Granny Oxeter. "They seem very decent young fellows."

Christopher's heart leapt.

"You will, too, won't you, mummy? Oh, do say you will. You will, won't you?"

Mrs. Herrick meant to take hers in. It seemed that Lord Colsonstown meant to also. So did General Allingham. Lady Stoke-Pogis could n't because she had nowhere to put them. Neither could the Admiral unless he doubled them up with — "Oh, fie, fie," cried a Mrs. Dempsey. Mr. Witson and Lady Sophia must fink fings over. But, one after another, the English people followed Mrs. Oxeter's lead, and expressed their intention of housing the men apportioned to them.

The Dempseys, demurring on the ground of propriety, were not the last to yield. It was n't as if they were a Family, they said. Still, the wind was very cold, and the

poor fellows had been waiting all day, and it did seem humaner to take them in then and risk — Heaven knew what! — than pay them off to seek other lodgings.

"I shall go back now," said Mrs. Oxeter, "and see that there 's something hot for them, poor creatures, whenever they come. Come, Laura. Tell him — the Bath-chairman. Allez! Are you coming, dear? And Christopher?"

"But I hope they won't bring anything infectious," said Christopher's mother.

What remained of the day was fraught with excitement for martial Christopher. He helped the maids to prepare the room for the coming guests, and, when there was nothing more to do, awaited their arrival with impatience. All his leaden soldiers were requisitioned and a review held on the hearthrug in the Droing-Room. His mother was kept busy answering his questions. But when did she *think* they would come?

This, like a thread of vivid colour in the making of tapestry, came up and up again; or like a recurrent note or phrase in music. Other questions were: Was it certain there would be two? Which two? Would it be the postman-one and Pierre Something? Yes, but it *might* be, might n't it? How long would they stop? Would they have their dinners with the servants? Could he have his dinner with the servants, too? Then could they have their tea with Trimmer and himself in the nursery?

The hours passed and no one came. It was near Christopher's bedtime. In an hour or so the *Retraite* would sound, when even soldiers went to bed — that ultimate limit of indulgence ever allowed to little boys at Boulogne in the seventies. With the passing of drums and bugles and the distant tramp of feet, all children of Christopher's age were in bed, whence they might hear it ere they went to sleep; but to sit up till the soldiers were called into barracks — that was for party nights only. To-night, however, . . . Christopher begged.

"Perhaps they won't come to-night at all, and if they

do they'll only have their supper and go to bed. You'll see them in the morning."

It might n't ever be morning, said Christopher. The end of the world might come in the night. It might. It said in the Bible you could n't tell when it would come. And then he would never see them at all.

"You don't know how much I want to see them, mother."

"Why?"

Christopher did n't seem sure.

"I want to see if I want to be one," he said at last.

Trimmer was told to come back in a quarter of an hour.

"Not a minute more, then, Master Christopher."

"That 'll *do*," said Master Christopher impatiently.

"It'll have to," said Trimmer, smiling. "Not one half demi-second more."

"It is n't *that* that will do," said Christopher.

But they had n't arrived when the quarter of an hour was up. Christopher knew he would have to go then. When Trimmer said demi-second in connection with bed-time there was no appeal even to his mother. He put away his leaden soldiers with rather more elaborate tidiness than usual, to make the process last as long as it might, but in the end, and like a wise prisoner, went quietly.

His mother came in to wish him good-night.

"If — before I 'm asleep."

"You will be. They've got to have their supper. Think, dear, they've been out in the cold all day."

"They've come, then? Oh, mother, they've come!"

Mrs. Herrick acknowledged that they had. They had arrived five minutes after he went up. She had seen them and they were now at their supper.

"Just for a minute" — Christopher's eyes were shining. "I'll go to sleep at once afterwards."

Mrs. Herrick consulted Trimmer with her eyelids. Trimmer after all was a Brick.

She said, "Yes, 'm, I think so."

"You promise, Christopher — if they come in just for a minute when they've done their supper, you'll go to sleep at once afterwards like a good boy?"

Christopher was ready to promise anything.

So it came that, treading on tiptoe in their heavy boots, two young French soldiers came smiling shyly to see a little English boy in bed. One of them was not the postman, but the other, by everything wonderful, was the young man from Adeville, Pierre Something.

"Oh, I wanted it to be you," said Christopher — for which, when it had been translated to him by Christopher's mother, the young soldier, first asking permission, took the little boy in his arms and kissed him.

CHAPTER V

In the night were excursions and alarms. Something woke Amélie the cook, who started up in bed and straightway woke Célestine. Together they sat up and listened. At the top of the house in the Rue Gil Blas was a large attic known as the granary. Off this on each side of the staircase were the servants' quarters. One room was occupied by Amélie and Célestine, a second for the occasion (and propriety!) by Miss Trimmer, the third by the recruits. It was from the third room that there came the disturbing sounds — whisperings, movements.

Amélie and Célestine took affrighted counsel together in the dark. Amélie, see you, had been sleeping like an infant when of a sudden she had jumped to waking. Célestine would know how she felt when she heard the strange men astir. She had thought to expire. It was a conspiracy, not a doubt of it. They would all be assassinated. She had read of such things and knew. Célestine wrung her hands under the bedclothes. What to do? Listen. That was the dropping of a boot. Perhaps those assassins there meant to brain them — four defenceless women and a little boy. The alarm ought to be given. Should she put her head out of the window and push a cry? It might be there would be a gendarme. Or the neighbours might hear. There was M. Brideaux next door, but he was no good, that one. Another boot! Something ought to be done. There was no time to lose. Oh, why had madame ever consented to take them in, those ruffians? And madame herself ought to be warned, and M'sieu Christophe, the innocent. If without moving they could only get at Mlle. Trimère. What was that? In spite of herself Célestine "pushed" a cry.

The striking of a match! The two young women held their breath trembling. Creakings, bumpings, the sound of a soft footfall. Ah! The opening of a door, a footfall, then in the granary — a hand on the latch of their own door. It was now . . . Heaven help them!

The door was opened cautiously, and the light of a candle revealed to the affrighted women not murderers, but Trimmer. She wore her waterproof cloak (with the rosette in the middle of the back) over her nightgown, and had thrust her feet into slippers. She was plainly disturbed, but not to the point of the Frenchwomen's panic.

"Oh, Mademoiselle Trimère! Mademoiselle Trimère! Do you think they kill us? Oh, Mademoiselle Trimère!"

"Stuff and nonsense," said Trimmer. "Still I can't think what they're up to."

"They muredure us in our slip," wailed the cook. "Tomorrow we are no more."

That the men were moving there could be no doubt. Subdued sounds, with now and then a louder, proceeded from the room across the landing. Moreover, Trimmer, shading her own light, had seen a light under their door.

"Perhaps I'd better speak to Mrs. Herrick," she said.

"Don't lif us. Oh, don't lif us. We come too."

"And frighten madame's life out with your silliness? Stay where you are."

You could not, however, enforce compliance in whispers, and it was a procession of three which tiptoed down the cracking stairs to the door of Mrs. Herrick's room. Nor would the shivering two stay outside the door.

Christopher's mother woke with a start to find three incongruously dressed females standing by her bed. Trimmer, we know, wore her rosetted waterproof with loop sleeves; Amélie her outdoor coat and a very short striped petticoat, and Célestine the quilt off her bed.

"Trimmer, for goodness' sake, what's the matter? Is any one ill? Master Christopher —"

"Oh, madame, calmez-vous, je vous en prie. Escape we instantly."

"No, 'm, nobody 's ill — Be quiet, you two stupids, can't you!" (Trimmer, terrible in the grey waterproof, turned on them.) "Hold your tongues and behave like grown women — Nobody 's ill and nothing 's the matter that we can be sure of. . . . "

"Is it fire?" Mrs. Herrick sat up, sniffing the air for a smell of burning. "The kitchen chimney wanted sweeping. I knew it. I said so."

"No, no, 'm. It is n't fire. It's the soldiers."

"The soldiers?"

For a moment Mrs. Herrick thought Boulogne was in the hands of the Germans.

Amélie said, "They assassinate us"; Célestine, "It is a conspiracy — a plote."

"Teyzy-vous! *Will* you keep quiet! Teyzy-vous, je vous dee." She turned to her mistress. "They're moving about in their room. There's a light under the door and they're talking in whispers. Even I don't know what to make of it. And these two ninnies are no more good than so many caterpillars" — her frown was annihilating — "You see it's the middle of the night, a quarter past three. I don't know, I'm sure —"

"One of them may be ill. Oh, Trimmer, the one thing I was afraid of was infection."

"It sounds more like as if they were dressing themselves than infection," said Trimmer. "If it was infection or anything of that sort, it would n't sound like this. It'd be more —" She broke off.

"More what, Trimmer?"

Even in the middle of the night Mrs. Herrick felt whimsically interested to learn what Trimmer thought infection would "sound" like. But Trimmer had broken off, and Christopher — curiosity in a little nightshirt — had added himself to the group.

For Christopher, awakened out of sleep, impressions,

indeed, to add to his store! First, voices penetrating his slumbers, coming to him as across measureless distances, to call him to earth. Earth suddenly then in the shape of his familiar bed made unfamiliar somehow by the circumstances of the strange moment; a groping for bearings, fear not far off exactly, but adequately held in check by curiosity, and by the knowledge, perhaps, under everything else, of the position of his room in relation to succour; a gradual realisation of the direction whence the sound of the voices proceeded; a sitting up, to become aware not only of voices, but of a light in the adjoining room, and, when he had stepped to the ground and padded across the floor in his bare feet, the odd sight of the odder group by his mother's bed! Delicious excitements for Christopher. More delicious still when apprehension found its way into them. For it must be admitted that there was a moment in Mrs. Herrick's room when all held their breath, and it was not only the shivering Amélie and Célestine who were frightened. These stifled a *Mon Dieu* apiece, and clung to each other in palpitating silence. Trimmer stiffened and turned her eyes on the door, and Mrs. Herrick took Christopher's hand. Every one listened. Christopher was n't exactly frightened. He could n't be of the soldier who had kissed him. But what he was was frightfully exciting. A stealthy foot on the stairs — two feet; four, to be accurate . . .

Afterwards, how they all laughed! Christopher went back to bed with a biscuit and a lump of sugar with eau de Cologne on it (to prevent his catching cold!). Amélie and Célestine giggled on and off for the rest of the night. Trimmer said Upon her Word! And Mrs. Herrick chuckled herself to sleep. Two young soldiers, without clock or watch, wake up in the night and think it is time to get up, and a household is thrown into panic. Well, well, well.

But it made for friendship all round. The young soldiers, desolated to have alarmed madame, reaped for their blundering something not unlike affection in the Rue Gil

Blas. Poor shy, conscientious things, what "gentlemen" they were — treading softly not to disturb, and disturbing everybody! It was somehow "pathetic." The incident had in it that touch of nature which makes the whole world kin. An Irishwoman would have said, "The creatures!" throwing approval and pity and everything else that is benign and exclamatory into an expression. Mrs. Herrick said, "Poor dears!" and meant nothing less. She was easily touched, perhaps.

Christopher stoutly declared that he had not been frightened. His mother owned, with Trimmer, that she had not known what to think. Trimmer added that as it just showed how different everything looked by day, it would be a lesson to her in the future.

"You've no need of lessons, Trimmer," Mrs. Herrick said. "You were courage itself."

"Ah, but you don't know what I was like inside, 'm," with a deprecating shake of the head. "Though I'd have died sooner," she added, "than show anything to Am'ly and Cel*e*stine — great sillies!"

"What *were* you like inside, Trimmer?" said Christopher, who naturally wanted to know. "Outside you had on your waterproof, and you did look funny."

"Funnier than I felt, then, Master Christopher. Which is answering your question."

Amélie and Célestine, however, had happily lost nothing in their own or each other's eyes by their undisguised tremors. Christopher, who had the *entrée* of the kitchen, found them exquisitely amused, and ready to enlarge upon the terrors which had assailed them. Amélie laughed till the tears rolled down her cheeks, and Célestine threw her apron over her head, cap and all, and rocked herself. Never had there been so good a joke. Conspirators? Assassins? The two innocents getting up and dressing themselves in the middle of the night. And Amélie and Célestine, one or other, had nearly opened the window, look you, and pushed a cry. Au secours! Au secours! If

any one had come! M. Brideaux for example in his horn spectacles? Or M. Artois from the stables down the street? Or Père Albert the tobacconist, with his Turk's cap on his head and snuff about his nostrils. The thought of these persons to the rescue was too much for the young women. They rocked in unison.

"Well, you need n't have been so silly," said Christopher.

"Silly! In the middle of the night! What would you? Oh, when I think of it —"

And off again, and over again, and so forth and so on. Trimmer could n't understand it.

"Though you can't help but smile," she conceded indulgently.

The young soldiers, it was clear, were the heroes of an adventure of which Amélie and Célestine were the heroines! With superior Trimmer you could not have helped smiling.

The work of the house went on oiled wheels meanwhile. The soldiers waited upon the maids in their spare time — chopped wood, drew water, carried coals. Fires were found miraculously laid, boots cleaned, and windows. Pixies might have had the house under their protection. The billet was for three days, but Christopher's mother asked her guests to stay on. Their delight was not less patent than Christopher's, to whom this period was a time of enchantment. He adored them, and they him, as they respectfully worshipped madame his gracious mother. He rode on their shoulders, his sturdy young legs round their willing necks. They rigged up a swing for him from a beam in the granary; swung him; taught him gymnastics; drilled him. They were formidable rivals to the attractions of the Bird-shop on the Port or even the landing of horses from the London boat. Saint Nicolas came, and mysterious additions to the contents of Christopher's stocking.

"Oh, they've been spending their money! They must n't. Oh, Trimmer —" said Mrs. Herrick.

"They were so set on it, 'm. They asked me if I thought you 'd mind. I was to smuggle the things in."

"Of course, I don't mind. Only —"

"Yes, 'm. I know. I had n't the heart to refuse them."

A humming-top with a song like the song of a hive, and a box of paints with a sliding cover, little bricks of colour in wooden compartments in which they rattled, china saucers, brushes, swelled the shifting collection of Christopher's cherished toys! Nor would they be thanked. It was nothing. It was Saint Nicolas, moreover, not they. Christopher hugged them for all that.

So, for Christopher, storing impressions, the outstanding features of the war were not in after years to be connected with the names of Napoleon III and William of Prussia, of Marshals Bazaine and MacMahon, with Gravelotte, Sedan, Metz, Strasburg, Paris, for milestones by the way to the ultimate cessions and indemnities, but rather with a top and a box of paints which remained to him to present two amiable young countrymen who nearly threw a household in the middle of the night into panic. Humming-tops in later years sang Alsace and Lorraine to him sadly for their gentle sakes, and paint-boxes shewed him nursery colourings of pictures in the "Illustrated London News." He was not a soldier.

CHAPTER VI

THEY went as they came — into the blue for out of it. There were tears in the Rue Gil Blas. Christopher cried frankly — hanging round the neck of Pierre About, whom he loved best. Jean Poulard came a near second, but Pierre from Adeville was first. Had he not seen Pierre before even the billets were settled? Had he not spoken to him then — in a way introduced him to his mother? Besides, Jean Poulard was in love with Célestine (Trimmer said so!), and used to look at her as he swung Christopher in the swing in the granary if, as was not infrequent, she was there to be looked at; and Pierre was not in love with any one, and so was free to be Christopher's friend. You could not help loving one person more than another — whom you yet loved nearly as much. You just did, and there was an end of it and no more to be said. Célestine, when the swinging was in progress, pretended to be heart-whole — leaning against the balustrade at the top of the granary stairs, and generally laughing. Pierre used to pretend that Jean was jealous if she turned in his direction, and Célestine would toss her pretty head. Jealous, indeed! Jealous! "Il n'y a pas d' quoi." That meant that there was n't any what, if it meant anything. What was what, then? Pierre seemed to know. Jean seemed to know. Trimmer *did* know. Christopher, flying to the skylight in one direction, and backwards to the sloping roof in the other, was always desperately interested. But Célestine, Trimmer said, was a Sad Flirt.

"Flairt?" said the innocent Célestine, "Fleurt? Qu'est ce que ça veut dire?"

"Oh, *you* know," said Trimmer.

Sometimes it was Célestine herself who was swung —

a screaming Célestine making pictures — *L'Escarpolette*, for example, with its attendant hazards! — and imploring, through her little shrieks of laughter, for mercy. Christopher, inciting Pierre or Jean, had none. Higher! Higher! Even Trimmer, there to look after Christopher and perhaps to play propriety, had to laugh. The spirit of the swing was irresistible. If only her understanding young mistress could have seen too! But that of course would have been out of the question . . . though she might hear — and did. It was a pity, however, for the sight was exhilarating, and Célestine's laughter infectious. How they were punishing her! She would laugh herself to the ground if she did not take care. What, still higher? Higher! She had brought it upon herself.

And then some one would say it was Trimmer's turn. Not Trimmer! — if she knew it. Not for some one of the period called Joseph!

All over, and Pierre and Jean off to the war! No wonder there were tears after so much laughter. No more gymnastics and drillings; no more enthralling accounts of life on a French farm; no more personal contact with the war — for that day, at least, Christopher, resentful, wanted it gloriously or ingloriously over. Célestine, weeping for her assassin, her conspirator, her peaceable Jean Poulard, was not more inconsolable.

"After all," Trimmer said, "there's nothing like a man in a house, 'm, is there?"

Mrs. Herrick smiled, but agreed with her.

It was Christopher's first experience of the transience of things generally. His mother had learnt her lesson long since, and watched him — thinking of one beside whom she had thought to watch him. To be sure he had not stood still. There had been Cheltenham where there was now Boulogne, but he had parted with no one before to whom he was or he imagined himself to be attached. He wandered about the house disconsolately, grieving, bored, uninterested, and, if it must be admitted of him, rather

cross. Poor Christopher, but oh, poor mother of Christopher, who had known Christopher's father! There was nothing, as Trimmer had said, and as Christopher had found out for himself, like a man in the house.

After the going of the soldiers, life in the Rue Gil Blas seemed rather flat to every one for a time. Boulogne was not very cheerful just then, though the times themselves were exciting. Dissatisfaction was rampant — France beginning to realise in earnest all that the surrenders of the autumn had meant. News from the front was discredited now. Disputant politicians were agreed in condemning, if in nothing else. The nation's enemy came in for scarcely harder words than its former leaders. It was *À bas* this one and that long since, and not as at first the Germans only. "Monsieur" Berdenheimer (Albrecht), the German book-binder of the Rue Trois Sœurs, who, popular as he was, had felt all along that he could not be quite sure of his position, knew still less what to make of it. It was touch and go with the Latin race. Would his windows be broken, after all? Resentment simmered, threatening at any moment to break into a boil. The people who had welcomed the Republic had looked to it to reverse the reverses, and with the Emperor and Bazaine for scapegoats had turned hopeful faces to the future. Napoleon and his marshals remained to them for execration, but were prospects improving? Business was said to be at a standstill. The women grumbled in the market. Their young men had been taken, and to what good? The shopkeepers grumbled behind their counters and across them. No one but felt the pinch of the times — had felt it since the disasters, but seemed now to be feeling it increasingly, and with the siege of Paris . . . things were at a pretty pass in a world which thought itself civilised! Depressed times, my masters, — strange, depressed, exciting times!

The more timid of the English community began now to talk of leaving. No one landed. Mrs. Oxeter was not

going to budge. The Lord bless her soul, was not God in his heaven and the Folkstone boat at her very door? Mrs. Herrick did not mean to move either. Christopher, living keenly again after the brief reaction, and taking impressions as a sponge sucks up water, was enjoying himself.

So life went on as before the war, only not quite as before, for there was always the feeling now, behind your walks or your lessons or your play, that something might happen — a rather pleasant feeling, Christopher thought. Had not something happened, indeed, in the recent billeting of the Mobiles on the town? Something more might at any moment. It was said presently that rats were being eaten in Paris. Rats! Think of that! Christopher, however, with the catholic palate of youth, thought he would rather like to eat a rat. He was quite sure that he would like to eat a mouse. Why, you could buy larks on a string in the market or at any of the poulterers' shops (only Christopher's mother never did, because it was cruel — well, because larks sang, then, and "it" was a "sin and a shame!"), so why should n't you eat mice, which, though they were smaller, even allowing for the lark's feathers, would of course be equally delicious on strips of toast? The accounts, then, of the eating of dogs, cats, and rats even did not horrify Christopher as they should have horrified him. Trimmer, with her outraged mouth awry at the mere thought of such things and her internal economy said to be "quite turned," could hardly eat her tea that day.

"I'd like a mouse," declared Christopher stoutly.

"To be sure, they eat snails in some parts of France," said Trimmer faintly. "I don't think I could sit at the table with one."

She sipped delicately.

Periwinkles were different, she held. They were shellfish, like oysters, which were very expensive. Besides, she was n't sure that she did like periwinkles so very much. Shrimps, now —

Shrimps ate anything, said Christopher — particularly corpses.

He was not to be horrified. But there were other stories — of starvation and sickness and cold — which impressed his young imagination deeply. It was "lucky," he said, that Pierre and Jean were not in Paris.

He went back to the sea and the quays and the gutters. There were other things in life besides the war, after all. Had he only thought he was martial? His mother, watching him, wondered. She did not believe, somehow, that, soldier's son as he was, he was going to be a soldier. Nothing definitely showed yet. Movements as of straws, perhaps. Did you need more, though, to tell you the wind's direction? Chaff would do that — dust, the lighter sweepings of the road. When she saw, then, that he was philosophical rather than combative in the small things of every day, and that while other boys for their excitement must be up and doing, he for his had not to do more than use his eyes and his ears and his nostrils, she drew her conclusions. By degrees, moreover, she began at this time to be dimly conscious of some inner life upon which her strange little son seemed to draw for his eager sustenance, and which he fed in turn with the harvest of these garnerings.

Oh, the sea and the quays and the gutters!

Then quite suddenly upon a day one traveller returned. A ring at the back door revealed to the answering Célestine not her Jean, it was true, but his comrade. The excited young woman summoned Amélie and Trimmer, and the three of them, rejoicing to see him again and noticing nothing at first, led him to the kitchen. His last letter had miscarried, or his correspondents in the Rue Gil Blas would have known that some of the Mobiles were to be quartered once more in the town. Orders and counter-orders had ruled their disposal, and they had seen no fighting. They were not billeted this time upon householders, but, the barracks being full, were sleeping (on straw) in such shelter only as the Custom House afforded.

Mrs. Herrick and Christopher were out when he came. It was Granny Oxeter's birthday, and they were spending the afternoon and evening with her at her house in the Place Molière. Christopher wore his best suit and was to stay up for late dinner at which there was to be champagne, a fascinating wine which in those days bubbled up like a fountain from the depths of the stem of your glass. But the day and the party were fixed in his memory as much for that which did not happen as for that which did. For, on the one by reason of the other, he missed his friend's visit — for which, as events turned out, his mother, at least, could never be sufficiently thankful. This — for he was never to see the young soldier again — must be counted for that which did not happen. That which did happen was that on this day he heard for the first time of the existence of Cora St. Jemison.

Pierre About, he learned afterwards, came to the Rue Gil Blas at six. At that hour Christopher was saying goodbye to the last of the visitors — the people in bonnets who had brought his grandmother flowers and knitted shawls and wished her many happy returns of the day. Then his grandmother and his mother and his two aunts drew their chairs round the fire for one of those enthralling grown-up conversations which he never tired of listening to. Experience had taught him not to ask questions and, the better to listen, always to occupy himself at such moments with a book. Questions only brought such answers as "Never mind, dear," or "You would n't understand," or "You'll know when you're older," if not, indeed, — from his Aunt Laura, who none the less adored him, — "Little boys should be seen and not heard"; the unfairest answer, surely, that ever was framed for the silencing of the acquisitive young. A book was covert — ambush even. Granny Oxeter's big Bible with the pictures — and what Christopher called the Hypocrapha — was shelter from under which Christopher, unperceived, assisted at many a confabulation not meant for his ears. It was thus that he had heard of the

Mrs. St. Jemison who could n't be called upon, and thus that he now heard of Cora.

In the Rue Gil Blas, meanwhile, time passed oddly. Pierre sat on and on in the kitchen. He was heavy and unlike himself — so unlike the young soldier who a short time back had helped on the one hand to scare the household and on the other to make the swing of laughter and love in the granary, that the servants knew not what to make of him. He talked of the p'tit m'sieur, and Christopher afterwards had that for his comfort. He drank coffee feverishly, but could not eat. He sat with his head in his hands. It was an effort to him to give what news he had to tell of his comrade. Jean Poulard was here or was there, he was not sure; but madame and the p'tit m'sieur, would they soon be in? Should he see them? It was a parrot cry. The good madame and the p'tit m'sieur — and they had explained to him so often.

Célestine, who had welcomed him in her excitement almost as Rhoda of old the Peter of all, when in hers she left him standing at the gate, exchanged anxious glances with Amélie and Trimmer. The man was ill, not a doubt of it. At eight o'clock Trimmer, really anxious, took action and sent for a doctor. By ten poor Pierre was in hospital.

A quarter of an hour later Mrs. Herrick and Christopher got home. Christopher happily was sleepy, or he might have wondered inconveniently why Trimmer opened the door to them, and why there was such a smell of sulphur in the house. There was something, moreover, in Trimmer's aspect and demeanour which ordinarily would not have escaped him. He would have seen for one thing that she was wearing her best dress, if, in the sudden light of the lamp after the darkness of the hired fly, he had not been blinking and winking, his knuckles to his eyes; nor probably would he have missed a signal which she made to his mother.

"You're tired out, darling," his mother said to him

quickly. "Go on up and begin to undress. We shall be up after you in a moment."

Christopher made for Trimmer, but she receded—oddly, he would have thought if he had been capable of thinking.

"Nonsense, Master Christopher, you must walk up yourself."

"Do as I tell you, darling."

Christopher mounted the stairs laboriously, a step at a time.

"There won't be a light," he said sulkily over his shoulder.

"Yes, there will," said Trimmer. "I left everything ready."

Christopher got as far as his room, where presently his mother found him fast asleep on the bed with his clothes on.

"There's nothing to be afraid of, 'm, and we've all had 'ot baths and I've changed to the skin, but I thought perhaps if you 'll put him to bed for to-night I'd better not go near him, being a child—Master Christopher, I mean. You see the poor young man sat here the best part of two hours or more, and all we could get out of him was when should he see you and the young gentleman. It was lucky I thought of the doctor, for I'm sure I did n't know what to do, and when *he* said smallpox—petty verole, as they call it—I said sulphur and hot baths, and we've had every window in the place open. Still, it's best to be on the safe side."

"His poor mother," said Christopher's. But what Christopher, waking suddenly out of sleep, wanted to know was: what was meant by "Custody of the Child."

"Custody of the Child?" said Christopher's mother. "You've been dreaming, darling."

"No, I have n't."

"But Custody—"

"My collar undoes first. Granny said it."

"Said what?"

"Said Mr. St. Jemison had it, and now he was ill, and if he died and there was nowhere else for Cora to go, she supposed Mrs. St. Jemison would have to."

"Oh!" Mrs. Herrick's forehead was puckered. "Have to what?" she said after a pause.

"Have to have it."

"Never mind Mrs. St. Jemison, dear. It's getting very late. Besides" — even mothers, as Christopher came to know when he was older, could use words inconsequently! — "besides, I did n't know you were listening."

So Pierre About went out of Christopher's life (for he died, poor fellow, not many weeks later), and, indirectly, on the same day, Cora St. Jemison, a mere name, but a name, it seemed, not to be spoken, came into it.

Christopher long remembered that particular birthday of the birthdays of his grandmother.

CHAPTER VII

If there was presently one person more than another in whom Christopher was interested, it was the beautiful lady who could not be called upon by grown-up people nor talked about before little boys. He knew her very well by sight. Her chignon was different from any body else's — different even from his beautiful mother's, whose, in turn, was, oh, so very different from his Aunt Laura's. His Aunt Laura's, and most other people's, contained what Christopher called stuffing, and Trimmer "frizettes," which generally showed through. No stuffing showed through his mother's thick plaits nor Mrs. St. Jemison's — nor Trimmer's, for that matter, which, as we know if we have not forgotten, were quite beyond her station and permitted only by her gentle mistress's indulgence. But while Trimmer's locks were brown, and his mother's brown, too, with a coppery tinge in the light, Mrs. St. Jemison's were of an incredible gold, more beautiful than anything Christopher had ever seen. You could see Mrs. St. Jemison's tresses from afar. They sauntered rather superciliously — discontentedly as often as not — under a mauve parasol with a folding stick down the Grande Rue, or along the Port, or down the planks laid on the softness of the upper "Sands." She would sit with a book in a beehive chair, or in one of the tents which you could hire, and look contemplatively or amusedly at the people who could not call upon her. Sometimes a very good-looking young Englishman would be with her, but she did n't seem to know anybody else. She always looked happy for the first few days when he was there, and the people who could n't call, some of whom knew him, turned their heads away more than ever and said It was Very Sad, and Such a Promising Young

Fellow, and something about a Wretched Entanglement, and a great deal about His Poor Father. Christopher knew they said these things, for, though his mother always fell into silence when Mrs. St. Jemison's name was mentioned, and, if Christopher had known it, had started at the first sight of the young Englishman and turned precipitately into a shop as if to hide, his aunts were not so reticent, and Christopher, when he was out with either of them, often found himself the listening one of a talking group. But the young Englishman, who, by the way, could always make Mrs. St. Jemison laugh, did n't look a bit Entangled, Christopher thought, and he certainly did not look wretched. He looked on the contrary very careless and light-hearted and sometimes rather cross. It was Mrs. St. Jemison then who looked wretched if any one did, — only it was more aggrieved, if Christopher had known it, than wretched, — and it was generally after that that the Englishman would not be there, and Christopher would know from what the groups said that he had Gone Back to his Relations. Christopher hated the groups.

He tackled Trimmer. Why could n't ugly people call? Because Mrs. St. Jemison had run away from her husband, if he must know, and at the last as at the first, according to Trimmer, that is, as according to any one else, Mrs. St. Jemison was not a Nice Woman. This Christopher disputed. He would pit his conviction against the opinion of any group. Oh, but she *was*, he maintained — nicer than any one in Boulogne except his mother. To that Trimmer, up in arms, said that he was n't to name her in the same breath with his mamma. Mrs. St. Jemison had taken steps that put her outside the Pale — whatever that meant. Christopher's "What Pale?" was overlooked in her vehemence. Leaving her little girl, too, — Trimmer had n't patience. Well, anyway, said Christopher, the nice Englishman thought her nice, and he, Christopher, would rather (if not precisely in these words) be thought nice by him than by all the ugly old women put together who sat in

groups on the sands, on week days, went to church in the Rue de la Lampe on Sundays, and wore bonnets and bugles and called on each other all day long!

"For shame, Master Christopher."

"I would," said Christopher stoutly, nor was he to be dislodged from the position he had taken up as the lady's champion. Trimmer, however, might be relied on to show wisdom in her generation, and to cease argument at the right moment. One thing would oust another, she knew that; and led Christopher from the scene of the discussion — the sands, where Mrs. St. Jemison, whether she was there or not, might always be felt to be in evidence — to the Esplanade, where planks and nails and much hammering were insisting just then on the imminent impendence of the summer fair.

"We'll see how they're getting on up there, shall we?" said Trimmer.

"Up there," where the Mobiles had once shivered in the cold, there was bustle and stir to divert the young mind. The merry-go-rounds had not arrived yet, but many of the shows were in course of erection. Gaunt frameworks, presently to be covered with canvas, threw unwonted shadows. Living vans stood by pegged-out claims where presently a Bearded Lady or a Giant or a Fat Woman would hold five-sou or three-sou court. Here dust was in the air, with many conflicting odours. Farther on, where the stalls would soon display their wares, the clean smell of wood was predominant and met the nostrils pleasantly. Here was a stall nearly finished. Packing-cases lay in it and outside it, and shavings and straw littered the ground. Here, again, the frame only was standing, and neat match-boarding waited the carpenter's will. Shining nails lay everywhere. You might pick one up at every step, and Christopher soon had his pockets full. The hammering was deafening in places. Every board, whether implicated or not, made itself a sounding-board for ringing blows. These echoed down the unfinished alleys, and, whenever they

found three walls, there made riot. It was Take that, and that, and that, — through poor Trimmer's head — Christopher enjoying it all, taking all he was given and asking for more!

Mingling with the scent of the wood was now and then a delicious smell of cooking. Here, as everywhere else in the town, or any French town, something very savoury seemed to be in course of preparation not far from wherever you might be, and through unfinished doors, or the alley between stall and stall, a glimpse might be caught of a woman stirring a saucepan or bending over a frying-pan, or lifting the lid of a pot, perhaps, to taste what it covered. Mrs. St. Jemison was forgotten; the nice Englishman; Cora.

Christopher jingled the nails in his pockets. He had tenpenny nails, nails with square flat heads, brass-headed nails, "brads," tacks, even.

"The 'oles I shall 'ave to mend," thought Trimmer to herself, — "the 'oles."

Still it was better than Mrs. St. Jemison — and ten minutes later it was Mrs. St. Jemison — Mrs. St. Jemison more than ever, Mrs. St. Jemison to some purpose.

Trimmer, it chanced, had made a conquest just then at Boulogne — not her only conquest, by any means, since she had lived with Mrs. Herrick, either there or elsewhere. But the English piano-tuner was rather an attractive young man, and his "superior" position impressing Trimmer, who frowned as often as not upon her conquests, she was inclined to smile upon him. Meeting him now by chance upon this summer's day she smiled upon him at some little length, and Christopher, left to himself for the unmeasured moment, wandered off to seek amusement or mischief. He found both near at hand, and was soon happy upon a hazardous see-saw of his own contriving.

Trimmer then might be as long as she liked with her piano-tuner. A rickety trestle supported the plank upon which Christopher balanced himself adventurously. He

threw his weight first upon one foot and then on the other, and the plank responded upon its rocking axis. A little crowd of gamins, never long absent anywhere, collected presently, and began to offer suggestions. Christopher, a good-tempered little boy, was for ignoring these politely, or even for explaining why he did not care to adopt them, when one ragamuffin, more aggressive than the rest, laid his hand on the swaying plank and pushed it.

Christopher's French was not idiomatic.

"Si vous faites ça encore —"

No sooner said than done. The plank swung suddenly round. The trestle heeled over. There was a crash and a cry and Christopher lay amid the wreck of his see-saw. He was on his feet in a moment, — ready with his little fists, too! — and was vaguely conscious of being spurred on by a voice which said, "Go it, young 'un. Punch their bullet heads for them," when of a sudden the world, like the plank, swung round, and Christopher sank to the ground. He was only dimly aware then of the precipitate flight of the boys as some one ran forward . . .

"It's the nice little English boy," another voice was saying when he came to himself.

"Young devils, I'd like to have broken their heads for them. What is it, little chap? Where does it hurt?"

"In my trousers," said Christopher. "I think it's one of the nails."

"One of the nails!"

"He's bleeding. Oh, poor little fellow."

"Hush, you'll frighten him. What nails, little chap?"

"The ones I picked up. You can find any number if you look, you can, really. Oh!"

He had moved a little as he spoke and the stab of pain which he felt forced a cry from him.

"It's in still. It's sticking in," he said — in rather a weak voice for Christopher.

It was indeed. He began to cry now in spite of himself. A spreading patch of blood was reddening his trousers.

He was wearing a white sailor suit and the encroaching stain looked dreadful upon the linen. Christopher wondered whether he was going to die.

The Englishman's fingers wrestled with buttons. Mrs. St. Jemison, pulling off her gloves, and ignoring the dust, was on her knees in a moment and helping him with gentle, capable hands.

"Now, pull," he said to her. "Easy! There's another button. No, it's the pocket. Stop, I'll cut it." He whipped out a penknife.

"Not you, little chap, don't be frightened. Only your pocket. It's all right. We won't even spoil your beautiful suit, though I think it'll have to go into the tub after this, won't it? That's better. Get my handkerchief out of my pocket. Inside. Yes, I shall want yours, too. Hold him up a little bit, will you? Now," to Christopher, "it'll hurt just for one second, old boy; you won't mind that, will you? and then you'll be as right as ninepence."

Yes, it did hurt for a second. Christopher held his breath. He would n't cry out. He would rather be hurt by the young Englishman than any one. He did n't much mind being hurt by the young Englishman. But, oh, it did hurt. He had to hold his breath *tight.*

"Where's Master Christopher?" Trimmer said suddenly.

The nearest hammering had ceased for some reason or other, and perhaps the comparative lull brought her back to a sense of her surroundings. She did not want her charge out of her sight for long amongst fair-folk whom she thought of as gipsies.

"Where's Master Christopher?"

"Not far off, you may be sure, Miss Trimmer."

"I don't know why, then," said Trimmer, "though I'm sure I hope you're right."

"No one," said the piano-tuner gallantly, — "no one who had the felicity to be privileged, so to speak, to *be* near you, could wish of his own will to wander very far."

"Tut, tut," said Trimmer, not ill-pleased all the same. "Not Master Christopher's view of the situation, I can tell you, when I have to say, 'No, you must n't,' to him, as I have to nine times out of ten — though a better boy never ate sour apples. Where is he, though? He was here not a minute ago — not five, anyway."

She looked about her. The ceasing of the hammering near at hand gave an unreal feeling to the moment. The piano-tuner and she, having been at some pains to make themselves heard, were left suddenly with raised voices. It was to Trimmer as if, walking in the dark, she had felt a searchlight suddenly turned on her.

The men who had been hammering jumped down from an unfinished stall and made hastily for the spot where the shows would be. Some women ran across the open space at the end of the alley.

"There's something up," said the piano-tuner.

"If there's a crowd Master Christopher's sure to be in it," said Trimmer. "I never saw such a curious boy — and not exactly curious either. More interested, I think. Interested in everything and wanting to see it and understand it. I'm sure, when he was smaller, I spent my time in nothing else than saying, 'Oh, do come along, Master Christopher.'"

"You would n't have to say that very often to me," said the piano-tuner. He had but one idea.

They began to walk towards the opening. Trimmer suddenly quickened her pace. Suppose Master Christopher were not round the corner, after all! She remembered a day when he and another little boy had gone off by themselves on the rocks and terrified their respective nurses out of their senses. They had been found then in their homes, calmly waiting the return of their missing guardians — the tables turned to some purpose! But the fright — the horrible "turn"!

"If he's not there," said Trimmer, "I'll never forgive you."

"Me?" said the piano-tuner,—"never forgive me?"

"Yes, you," said Trimmer sharply, but, repenting her of the evil as she saw his face fall, added, "Nor myself either," for his comfort.

They reached the opening. Yes, there was a crowd sure enough. Trimmer hurried forward. Christopher would be in the thick of this. It did not surprise her that she should not see him on the outskirts. He would have wormed his sturdy litheness to the middle of it, where he would be asking questions, making suggestions, answering its components in their own tongue. Well, well, she knew where to find him; and approached now, nothing doubting.

To her surprise the crowd broke for her. Afterwards she realised that some one, who had perhaps seen the pair together, recognised her as Christopher's nurse and made way for her, telling the others. To her at the time it was as to the Israelites when they saw the waters of the Red Sea parting before them. When she saw Christopher, pale then from loss of blood, and saw who they were who were ministering to him, her feelings were such as could with difficulty have been put into words.

Mrs. St. Jemison and the young Englishman — with help from Christopher, proud of the inch and a half of tenpenny nail which had been pulled out of him — quickly explained the situation. The wound was being bound up with the two handkerchiefs. Even in that moment of fear and dismay, Trimmer remembered that the handkerchiefs were "compromised."

"He ought to see a doctor at once," the Englishman said aside to her, when he had put the last pin (Mrs. St. Jemison's pins!) in the bandage. "I don't think he's done himself much harm, but he has lost a little blood, and the wound ought to be seen to. Who is your mistress's doctor?"

Trimmer named him. She was trembling, but itching to get Christopher to herself.

The bandaging was finished, but at least she could dress him. Like Mrs. St. Jemison before her, she fell to her

knees beside him, and with nimble albeit shaking fingers began to adjust his clothes. The Englishman resigned him to her greater experience.

"I should like to have punched those boys," said Christopher.

"You wanted to get at 'em, did n't you, little chap?" said the Englishman, smiling. "He's a plucky little devil," he added under his breath to Trimmer.

Mrs. St. Jemison stood now looking on. With the coming of Trimmer her part seemed done. She, perhaps, could see that the English nurse was chafing to get her charge away from his surroundings. Trimmer's manner was perfectly respectful, but to Mrs. St. Jemison, accustomed to the looks of people who could not call and to varying degrees of disapproval or criticism, its significance would be patent. Trimmer had turned a listening eye upon her when she spoke, but had addressed herself only to her companion.

"I'll take him home now, sir, thank you. I'll get a fly. I shall be able to manage."

She rose to her feet and shook the dust from her skirt. Her face lifted as her eye fell upon the piano-tuner, who stood at the edge of the crowd.

"Get me a fly," she said, and turned back to Christopher. "Say good-bye, Master Christopher, and thank the gentleman and the lady for their kindness."

"The fly's not here yet," said Christopher.

"It will be in a minute, dear," she said, controlling her voice with difficulty. "We must n't trouble the gentleman and the lady any further."

"He ought n't to walk, you know," said Mrs. St. Jemison to the Englishman, doubtfully. "He ought n't, you know. It might bring on the bleeding again."

"You'd better let me carry you to the fly," said the Englishman. He addressed Christopher, but in a manner that did not exclude Trimmer.

"I'll carry him, sir, thank you —"

"No you won't, Trimmer. I won't be carried. I'll walk."

"No, little chap, you must n't walk."

"Trimmer shan't carry me," said Christopher. "Why can't I walk?"

The reason was explained to him discreetly.

"You shall carry me," he said then.

Trimmer said nothing. The Englishman said nothing either, but lifted Christopher in his arms and began to walk with him in the direction of the Grande Rue. Mrs. St. Jemison walked on one side of him, Trimmer on the other. The crowd began to disperse or followed. The workmen went back to their hammering. Such of the crowd as were following were reënforced by newcomers. These came from behind the half-built shows or out of them, or were the casual and the passer-by. Trimmer's silence was palpable. Ten to one there would n't be a fly to be had for love or money, and what then? Was her mistress's son to face half the length of the Grande Rue in his present company, a growing crowd following? The thought was intolerable.

"If you'll put him on the seat at the corner, sir, I'll wait till the fly comes."

"You'd better do as she wishes," Mrs. St. Jemison said in a low voice.

"Will you tell me something?" Christopher was saying to the bronzed ear near his face.

"Anything you like, little chap."

"I want to know your name when I tell mother."

"My name, eh?"

"That's Mrs. St. Jemison, I know, and her daughter's called Cora."

"Oh, you know all that, do you?" said the Englishman, smiling, but an odd look came into his face and he turned his head away a little.

"Yes," said Christopher. "You don't mind, do you?"

"No, little chap."

"What's your name, then?"

"Oh, there *is* a fly," said Trimmer. "There is one." Her eagerness was painful.

"My name's John Hemming, little chap. If I thought it would hurt you to know it, I would n't tell you. Good-bye and God bless you."

He motioned to Trimmer to get in, and deposited his burden in her lap. Mrs. St. Jemison stood back.

"I — I am grateful to you, sir," said Trimmer unsteadily, "and — and to the lady, too. My mistress would wish me to thank you —"

The Englishman stopped her with a gesture.

"Put him to bed," he said. "I'll see that the doctor is sent to you."

It was not till then that Trimmer burst into tears.

CHAPTER VIII

CHRISTOPHER'S accident was a little more serious than had been supposed at first. Before the fly arrived at the green-shuttered house, the bleeding had broken out afresh. The ominous stain shewed itself suddenly to be spreading upon what was still white of the white trousers, and Trimmer, in the shaking fly, improvising an urgent tourniquet with her handkerchief and trembling fingers, may have repented her precipitancy in dismissing even damaged Samaritans. Christopher was half fainting when she carried him up the steps.

Célestine's cry on beholding him — she was always ready to "push" cries, as we know — brought Mrs. Herrick from the dining-room where she had been settling flowers. Her face grew as white as Christopher's.

"Trimmer!" she said, catching her breath.

Trimmer hastened to reassure her.

"Not badly. Not badly, thank God. It's the loss of blood. He slipped off some boards at the fair —"

Christopher opened his eyes to say, "I did n't. They pushed me," and closed them again as his mother's arms slid round him, reminding him of nursery days.

Trimmer accepted the amendment.

"They pushed him," she said, — "some little gamins — his see-saw, as I understand. And a nail ran into him. He had n't been out of my sight half a minute, and you'll never forgive me, for nice hands he'd got into — though their kindness you would n't believe. Oh, I'll tell you, 'm, by degrees. The first thing's to get him to bed."

They got him to bed without loss of time, Mrs. Herrick wasting none in useless questions or lamentations, and, for something of conviction in Trimmer's tone, even accepting

her assurance that the doctor would be with them as soon as was humanly possible. Trimmer, shaken and upset, began to recover herself. It was strange, and significant, too, how complete a confidence the young Englishman had inspired in her. Through all her antagonism she knew that she could trust him. Oddly enough, she knew that, in this, at least, she could have trusted Mrs. St. Jemison too.

"If one's out," she said to herself, "he'll find another," and with her mind's eye could see Mr. Hemming scouring the town. But the doctor had not been out, and Christopher had barely been laid between the cool sheets before the sound of wheels at the door told of his arrival.

From the window of Christopher's room she saw him hop from the fly. Its remaining occupant, with a wave of the hand to him and a word to the coachman, was driven off as the doctor's ring sounded

"He has been quick," said Trimmer; but she did not mean the doctor.

Bed for Christopher, then, for some days, it was probable. A bad night followed his accident. A suspicion of poison in the wound and a resulting "temperature." He tossed and turned and could not sleep, or slept and dreamed. He was so hot. He was burning. He was sure he was on fire. And he was thirsty. Oh, not barley water. Plain water. Cold water. Oh, not just a little like that. A long, long drink . . .

His mother was always beside him when he woke, and her cool hand there to put upon his burning forehead. How cool it was each time, till the burning of the forehead heated it. But it was always cool again in a moment, and never tired. Trimmer was in and out all night too. She wanted her mistress to go to bed, but in vain.

"For an hour, 'm — just for an hour."

"No, I'd rather stay."

The two sat by the shaded lamp near his bed.

Christopher, half dozing, heard scraps of whispered con-

versation. Trimmer was always saying, "I'll never forgive myself," and his mother, "Nonsense, Trimmer. How could you help it?" or "It was n't your fault."

"What I could have wanted to stop there talking for! It is n't as if — and besides. Though who could have supposed!"

"Nobody. You're not a bit to blame."

"But if I had n't, it would n't have happened."

"Oh, nonsense and stuff," his mother would say absently. This many times.

Then there was another sort of conversation of which Christopher, waking suddenly from a longer dozing, became aware, and to which I am afraid he listened, using stillness for ambush, as, in its hour, he had used Granny Oxeter's big Bible.

"Down on her knees in the dust, 'm, and the skirt was embroidered six rows. Down in all the dust, and you know what that is when they're putting up the shows. French dust, too, which nobody'll ever persuade me is n't dustier than English. But there she was, and if it had been to tear up her petticoat, I believe she'd have done it."

"It was wonderful. Poor, poor woman."

Christopher wanted to ask why.

"And me hardly speaking to her civilly, because I could n't bear that she should touch him — and ready to cry too for her kindness. It was dreadful. I must have seemed as hard as hard. But inside — well, she could n't know that. She saw. Oh, she saw. She was all for stopping him and keeping out of it. Of course I hardly said anything, but she's had something to put up with, any one could tell, and to have to hurt her —"

"Oh, I hope you did n't."

"I don't know, 'm. I spoke to him, 'm, when I had to. Oh, I did n't forget my place. Nobody could say I was n't respectful. But you don't have to use words to express an attitude, and one part of what I was feeling she felt; that I know. The other part she did n't. She'll

never know, not being able to see my inside. It was like throwing stones at a wounded animal. She's not happy, 'm."

"No," said Mrs. Herrick. "How could she be?"

"Which makes it twenty times worse."

"Tell me about him." The voice did not sound quite steady which said this.

"His gentleness I shall never forget," said Trimmer. "Never. Though why I should have made choice between them — speaking to him, I mean, when I had to, without a look if I could help it in her direction, passes my comprehension — looking at things fair and square as I am now. Still, there it is. It's the woman we blame when all's said. If Master Christopher'd been his own son he could n't have been more tender. The handkerchiefs I 'll wash myself, 'm. And proud of him like — as if he might have wished for a boy of his own. 'Little chap' he called him."

"'Little chap'! Did he?"

"To bring the tears to your eyes, 'm."

"Oh, the poor fellow."

Why again?

"And all the while, under my 'ardness, I was thinking to myself that it would have gone hard with her to resist him, 'm, and we don't know what she may have gone through. S-s-h, 'm."

Trimmer held up her finger.

"What is it?"

In a moment they were both leaning over the bed.

"He is n't asleep."

"Can't you, darling? Can't you get to sleep? Count sheep going through a gate. Or shall I sing to you?"

"Oh, I'm so hot," said Christopher.

They shook up his pillows and turned them. That was better, was n't it? Yes, but only for a little while, for the cool pillow grew hot. It was time for his medicine then. He watched his mother measure it out — an Eighth Part every Four Hours. He had taken two Eighth Parts now,

she said to divert him. Twice eight was sixteen. He had taken One Sixteenth, had n't he? — which was a great deal.

It was Trimmer who detected the flaw in *that* argument. According to that, she said, the dose about to be taken would make One Twenty-fourth, and just look at the bottle.

"Well, three eights are twenty-four," Mrs. Herrick began to say and looked at the bottle — well, it was the middle of the night! Mrs. Herrick's laugh was always good to hear, and Christopher laughed because she did. But his great restlessness had begun again. No, the wound was not hurting him. It was only — only —

"Only what, darling?"

He did not know, and was crying.

Then his mother sang to him as in the very early days, and chose "Lord Lovel."

"I want to see him," said Christopher.

"Lord Lovel?"

"The Englishman — Mr. Hemming."

That was what Mrs. Herrick had been afraid of. It was what Trimmer had known was inevitable. The two exchanged glances.

In the early hours of the morning, when Christopher grew easier, his mother consented at last to go to bed. Even then she did not sleep, but lay listening from her own room for sounds from his. At six Trimmer looked in to tell her that he was sleeping comfortably, and she suffered herself to close her eyes. But she did not sleep much even then. At eight she was with him once more.

It was a lovely morning. The sun streamed through the window on to Christopher's bed, and with it came noises from the busy street. The sound of the emptying of water was never long absent from such noises. Boulogne gutters must flow with soapy water, as Boulogne

housewives must scour and scrub. The cry of the coal came in and the cry of the shrimps; other cries, some of them ugly: Mme. Levêque, who lived over the coach-house, and drank, screaming for Alphonse or Louise; a carter swearing at an overladen horse; but for the most part the pleasant sounds of life and a workaday world.

Christopher, awake now, washed and comfortable in a clean nightshirt and a newly made bed, his rumpled hair brushed and combed, lay still and received languid impressions. Trimmer had "settled" him and given him his breakfast, and had now left him to make her own toilet and break her own fast.

A solicitous Amélie, in temporary charge of him, surrendered him to her mistress.

"I descend now," she said, "to make mount madame's tea."

His mother heightened the feeling of sunshine in the room. She wore a crackling calico dressing-gown which was all over little green sprigs, and her hair was in the long plaits by which he used to drive her when he was smaller. She drew him into her crackling arms.

"You're better, darling. You're better, thank God."

Yes, he was better. There was no doubt of that. His cheeks were no longer flushed, and his eyes no longer shone feverishly. The hot, dreadful night was over, and he only felt tired.

"You had a nice breakfast?"

He nodded.

"I was n't very hungry. I don't like dry toast very much, and I'd have liked tea."

"Milk, darling, 's better for feverish little boys. We want the doctor to find you much better when he comes."

"Is he coming again?"

"Yes, darling."

"Am I going to be ill long?"

"No, dearest, I hope not. I think not. Why?"

Christopher traced the pattern of one of the green sprigs

with his finger. The sprigs were little bunches of myrtle tied with love-knots of pink ribbon.

"Why did you keep saying 'poor' last night if you don't like them?"

"Poor?"

"About *them*. When Trimmer was telling you. You said, 'Poor, poor woman,' and then you said, 'Poor fellow.' And Trimmer was beastly to them — at least, not beastly, but — I don't know. Anyway, she hates them. She won't let me even say, 'There's Mrs. St. Jemison,' when we see her on the Sands; she says, ''Ush, Master Christopher' — and her dress *was* all over dust where she knelt on it — Mrs. St. Jemison, I mean — and I bled on his trousers where he held me. I saw the mark, and he did n't say anything, though it was as big as half a franc."

There was a moment's pause before Mrs. Herrick spoke. Christopher traced the outline of a whole sprig on the starched dressing-gown.

"He seems to have been very, very kind to you," she said. "I shall never forget it to him — to either of them. Trimmer does n't hate them really —"

"Not inside, perhaps," interrupted Christopher, "but you can't see inside. She said so last night. I heard her. And outside she was offended all over."

Mrs. Herrick smiled in spite of herself, so aptly did Christopher seem to her to have expressed Trimmer and her attitude. Offended all over. She could see Trimmer — straightened, rigid, offended all over!

"She thanked them, dear. She did thank them. She said that I should wish her to thank them."

Christopher clung to his point.

"I would n't let her carry me," he said. "She only wanted to prevent him. She wanted to get me away all the time."

Mrs. Herrick looked at her son's remonstrant face, and did not answer immediately. The laughter left her eyes.

"Trimmer was in a very difficult position," she said

when she spoke. "I can't explain to you. You do trust me, don't you, Christopher? Well, you must just take what I am going to say without understanding it. There are reasons why we can't be friends with Mrs. St. Jemison and Mr. Hemming. Very sad reasons. You will understand one of these days, and you will know that we could n't help it. The reasons make it impossible for us to know them. No one realises this better than they do themselves. They know, Christopher."

"But you like them or you would n't have said 'Poor.'"

"I am sorry for them both. Things might have been so different. Yes, I do like them, I must, for their goodness to my son."

"They'll never know," said Christopher. "It's inside you're sorry. It's inside you like them. And they can't see inside. Even Trimmer said that. They won't know you're sorry. They'll think you hate them like Trimmer — even if she does n't hate them. And *she* knelt down in all the dust, and I bled on his trousers."

Christopher, weakened by recent loss of blood and the more recent fevers of the night, burst into tears.

"They'll never know," he sobbed. "They can't know if we don't tell them. It's dreadful to seem horrid to people when you love them, and I love him better than any one — except you — and — and Pierre, and Pierre's dead. He tried not to hurt me when he pulled the nail out, and it did hurt, and I did n't cry, and he said I was plucky. But it was n't that. It was because —"

"Because what, dear?"

"Because I would n't have minded how much he hurt me, and he'll never know. He'll never know."

Mrs. Herrick's arms closed more tightly round him. His tears wet the sprigs on her dressing-gown — took the "starch" from the calico where they fell. She whispered endearments, comfort. But he would not be comforted. In her heart she was proud of him. Her boy was a gentleman.

"You must n't cry, Christopher. You'll make yourself ill again. He will know. If he 's what I take him to be — what I do believe him to be — he'll understand. I know what you feel — and I'm glad to think my boy does feel in this way."

Christopher shook his head.

"You know because I've told you, but I have n't told him."

He refused to be comforted.

CHAPTER IX

In the end it came that a strange hour found Mrs. Herrick writing a difficult letter. Christopher was not making such progress towards recovery as, considering his youth and the nature of his illness, he should have made, and something not unlike anxiety began to threaten the green-shuttered house. Mrs. Herrick would not admit that there was cause, or that there was likely to be cause, for anything so unnerving, so terrible; but the hour came, all the same, when she wrote to John Hemming. It might have surprised Christopher to know that her letter, though after long deliberation, began "Dear John."

She took no one into her confidence but Trimmer, who was to find out where he was staying, and thither convey the letter to him. In the circumstances there was no one that she could consult. Her mother, to be sure, was largely tolerant and, within limits, was always for living and letting live. She had fewer of the arbitrary prejudices of her time than most people, and would at least have seen that there were two sides to a question. With her Mrs. Herrick would gladly have talked out her intention. But of her sisters, Laura and Catherine, good timid creatures, inclining, of weakness, to rigid orthodoxy and to interminable discussions, she could not be sure. They had not thought that she should even write to Mrs. St. Jemison to thank her, when she returned the handkerchiefs. It was in deference to their high-pitched opinion that she had so far compromised as to write impersonally, in the character, that is, of the Mother of the Little Boy who met with an Accident, and to whom the Lady and Gentleman, whose Handkerchiefs she was returning, had been so very Kind; but her own inclination would have been to write in

ner own name and take her chance of embarrassing consequences.

Mrs. St. Jemison had an apartment in the Rue Racine. Everybody knew that, and it was there that Trimmer had taken the first letter, dropping it into the box after dark, and hurrying away as fast as her virtuous legs would carry her. But Mrs. St. Jemison, it seemed, if she had thrown her cap over the windmill, had some regard to appearances and had no thought of throwing her two dainty shoes in its wake. Mr. Hemming, so Trimmer discovered, was to be found no nearer to his lady's bower than the Hôtel des Deux Mondes, a good quarter of a mile away, on the Port. There, having run him to earth, — the piano-tuner aiding her, — she delivered her letter.

Mademoiselle would wait the reply?

"No, thank you," said Trimmer, with a significant look at her attendant, whom nevertheless she promptly dismissed, before hurrying away on the feet of the prudent. Her attitude was strictly non-committal. She neither disapproved nor approved of her mistress's action. Something had to be done — so much was clear. Master Christopher as the days passed was not picking up his strength, and had taken an "idea" into his curly head. Master Christopher mattered more than any one or anything else under the sun, but . . .

Impossible for Trimmer, with her training and her instinctive prejudices, to eliminate the Buts which crowded upon her exercised mind. It — the wisdom of the move — was as it might be. She could go no further than that.

And so to the sum of his young impressions Christopher added another. He would always remember the Wonderful Visit. It was like the visit of Pierre and Jean to his bedside, on the night long ago of their arrival, when the greatly desired had happened; like other things, "surprises" for

the most part, but, perhaps, for the ardour with which he welcomed it, like nothing else at all.

It was late in the afternoon of the day on which Trimmer had been sent on a mysterious errand about which he had been vaguely curious, when the bell of the front door was heard to ring. His mother in a muslin dress, also with sprigs upon it, was reading to him, and something in the way she broke off to listen arrested his attention. It was half-past six by the clock on the mantelpiece. Only intimate visits in the ceremonious seventies were paid so late in the afternoon.

"Who at that hour?" his mother's expression said plainly, yet with a tag which escaped him and may have been the "Unless —" which, in the circumstances, it probably was.

His grandmother had called earlier, and his two aunts — his Aunt Laura in a new hat which, it had been agreed at some length, did not become her, and which, as she could "conscientiously" be said hardly to have worn it, she was going to "take back to the shop." Unless in connection with this anything had happened to make further consultation necessary, it was improbable that a second visit would be paid that evening by any member of the family. Who, then? The doctor had taken Christopher upon his morning round.

Célestine could be heard answering the summons.

Christopher looked at his mother. She was sitting with the book open upon her knee, listening intently.

Together they listened.

"Who do you think it is?" Christopher whispered, though, as his room was on the second floor, there was no very urgent reason for lowering the voice. Was it something in the moment that asked for whispers?

Some one was being shown up to the drawing-room. Célestine's foot was on the stairs. It surprised Christopher a little that, instead of waiting till Célestine reached

the door, his mother put down the book and went to meet her at the top of the stairs. He did not hear what Célestine said, but he heard her go down.

To his surprise, and even a little to his indignation, also, his mother followed her without coming back to him. He heard her open and close the door of the drawing-room.

It seemed a long time before any further sounds reached him from below. No one had remembered even to send Trimmer to him. He lay still and looked at the ceiling. And at the wall paper. And at the window. He was very tired of being in bed. Who was downstairs? Not that it mattered. He hated visitors.

His toys were where he could get at them, but he did not turn in their direction. He felt as at the dreary time which had followed the departure of the young soldiers. Nothing interested him very much. A solitary fly was stationary on the ceiling. It did not even walk about to amuse him. The wall paper had rosebuds and ribands upon it, but no birds to chase butterflies as on the Cheltenham paper to which he sent a regretful thought flying. The window was not near enough to see out of.

And then in five minutes everything had changed — nothing actually, for the fly, which was dead, remained stationary, the wall paper produced no birds or butterflies, the distant window showed him no more than its patch of sky — but everything, everything! There was the sudden sound of the drawing-room door being opened. This according to precedent should mean departure. There was a sound of voices on the stairs — going down? not going down; coming his way! — his mother's and another voice. It was the sound of the second which raised Christopher's head from its pillow. His heart beat wildly under his little nightshirt.

"Somebody has come to see you," said his mother, appearing at the door.

"Mr. Hemming!" said Christopher.

Had the fountains of life been stayed, so that they flowed sluggishly, grudgingly? the healing juices been withheld? It seemed so. For it was presently manifest that from the moment Christopher had unburdened his soul of its debt of gratitude, — unburdened it, rather, of the suspicion of ingratitude under which, by reason of Trimmer chiefly, it supposed itself (odd little soul!) to be lying, — he began to mend. It was as if the blood he had spilled flowed back into his veins, permitting nature to do its beneficent work.

John Hemming, sitting by the bed and hearing Christopher's blushing incoherences about what Christopher had thought he must think, understood — had understood, it seemed, all along. Mrs. Herrick, standing at the foot of the bed in her pretty sprayed muslin, watched him as he reassured her breathless little son with 'Little Chaps' (as Trimmer had said of them, to bring tears to your eyes!), and a delightful smile and the pressure of the kindest hand that ever showed breeding and strength.

She had not done unwisely, whatever the aunts and even Trimmer might think. But oh, John Hemming, who had once wanted to marry her, and oh, the pity of everything!

CHAPTER X

CHRISTOPHER, though John Hemming may be said indirectly, or even directly, to have helped him to recover, was not destined to add many impressions of that elusive physician to his large store. Those that he did add were puzzling. Why, after the intimate talk in his room, did his new friend recede to an even greater distance than that at which Christopher had viewed him in the days before the accident, when he had been not Mr. Hemming at all, but the Englishman who looked so much nicer than any one else at Boulogne, and over whom, for Christopher, by reason of a mysterious connection with the beautiful lady who could not be called upon by the stuffy groups, there shone all the glory of suspected romance? Things happened — or rather did not happen. For the friendly pressure of his hand, he gave the little boy the barest nod of recognition when Christopher waved to him across a road; and he did not stop, though he must have seen that Christopher meant to elude Trimmer and run over to him. This was bewildering, even when you had been warned that something of the sort must happen. But worse followed; meeting Christopher with his mother almost face to face in the street, he did not appear to see either of them — looked straight before him!

Christopher, withdrawing an outstretched hand and chilled to the marrow, looked at his mother. Her eyes were on shop windows. He could hardly restrain his tears. Did he make his friends only to lose them? He was too young for the thought to take shape. But there was Pierre — dead; and there had been, and there was not, John Hemming. His poor little heart was very full that day. No sun or open sea or quays or gutters could ease it.

But life scurried on — which may have been by grown-up arrangement. As there had been no time to grieve for poor Pierre, so now there was none to see this new emotion out. Moreover, about this period, to the relief of one exercised looker-on, Mrs. St. Jemison, as the group would have told you, "disappeared" from Boulogne (leaving, it is probable, in the ordinary way; though the groups having plumped for disappearance would have no other word) — and the Hôtel des Deux Mondes on the Port lost a guest. Whether the departures were traceable ever so indirectly to the effect of recent events upon one from whom, whatever his shortcomings, you would look somehow for nice feeling, it is not for me to say. Christopher's mother may have had her own opinion. She did not express it, but, watching Christopher, whose blankness, we may be sure, did not escape her, she decided that the time had arrived to send him to his first school.

Thither he went, escorted daily to and fro by Trimmer or his mother, and there, with a baker's dozen of the sons of some of the English Nobility and Gentry of the French town, began his young studies in earnest.

What his wise mother had hoped for happened. The world widened suddenly. There were schoolboys for the tidied-up children he played with at parties; strifes, ambitions, emulations — punishments even: excitements such as he had never known. He hated it all for a week, and then, still hating it as, of your loyalty to boyhood generally, you must hate everything that had to do with lessons, fell under the spell of a fuller life. John Hemming became a memory to him like, Pierre About, whom he had yet loved; Mrs. St. Jemison also; he no longer wondered about Cora.

It was then that, if he had been old enough to observe his mother as she, of her love, observed him, he might have remarked that something had come into her gentle life to disturb it. What? She herself hardly knew. So secure had she thought herself in this backwater into which fate had softly floated her little barque, that it was not till

some time had passed, after the waters had been troubled, that she realised that any disturbance had taken place. She had her memories and Christopher. There was not a day that a thought did not take its flight to the grave in India which held her faithful heart; not an hour that Christopher himself was absent from her active thinking. The sight nevertheless of John Hemming had shaken her.

Observing herself at close quarters, Mrs. Herrick, without knowing it, learned something of herself — perhaps even of the incomprehensible sex to which she belonged. She had loved, and she loved, her husband; had never loved any one else. Yet, because of this, — was it possible? — John Hemming, out of the past which held both of them, had the power to trouble her. He stood to her for the time — so short a time back in reality! — which had been for her the time of love. A sense of defencelessness seized her. Was nothing too remote, too disproportionately large or small, to have its effect upon a woman's heart? Two countries go to war, do they, and a provincial town is wrought and fraught with excitement just to cause its pulses to beat faster or slower as the case may have been? The maid falls in love with the soldier. Had that its part in contributing? — the harmless young soldiers themselves as symbols of vigorous life? Christopher's interest in them and theirs in him? — the very swing they had put up for him, in the granary? Men's unfamiliar voices for women's . . . Trimmer's "There's nothing after all, 'm, like a man in the house . . ." ?

She could have hidden her face for shame — if these things had a share in disturbing her . . .

Trimmer's words may have rung in her ears, playing a tune to which, at the mercy of it, her harassed thoughts must dance. The sturdy footfall for the swish of skirts. Downrightness — uprightness, even, perhaps! — for subtleties. The wide airs of heaven for the sheltered hearth . . . The man in the house, in short! It was dreadfully true. There was, when all was said or sung, nothing like that.

For so long she had forgotten. The time of love had seemed so far behind her. She had thought herself safe. She had thought herself divided by a lifetime and her sorrow from the eager life of youth, when all the while it needed but the sight of one who had once wanted to marry her (and now belonged to another!) — of one, unchanged, boyish-looking still, in spite of experience which might have been expected to sober him, to tell her that, at not much more than thirty, she too was young. It was frightening.

Christopher naturally saw nothing. Little boys do not see. There was little, moreover, to see, so that even Trimmer saw nothing. Mr. Hemming to her was an attractive stranger, that was all, of whom she knew nothing more than that he was (because he must be!) something of a scapegrace, by reason of which, in admitting him at all to the house, a risk had assuredly been run. She did not know, for Mrs. Herrick did not tell her, that he was not a stranger at all.

Mrs. Oxeter may have guessed something. She had been told, of course, long since, of the young man's visit, and had not disapproved, though Christopher's aunts, duly informed of it at the same time, — after the event, as we know, — shook their heads. She knew more, however, than they, and had the two and two in her possession which had but to be put together to make visible four. She alone knew, perhaps, why Christopher's mother, who had never been of the kind to speak of her conquests, had fallen into silence when Mrs. St. Jemison was mentioned. Oh, yes, Mrs. Oxeter may have guessed.

"As likely as not she reproaches herself," she thought, searching her daughter's face for what it was exactly that she fancied had come into it lately, — "as likely as not she thinks she's to blame for his lapses."

The house seemed suddenly to have grown silent. It was because Christopher was at school. It was because — because of a hundred things. Trimmer was sometimes sent

for to bring her work to the drawing-room, or Mrs. Herrick would take hers to the "nursery," where Trimmer still sat.

"I miss him more than I can say."

"So do I, 'm."

"Even his troublesomeness."

Trimmer would not hear that Christopher was, or could have been, troublesome.

It was more than ever a house of women. Much sewing was done. Mrs. Herrick would help Trimmer — asking for work.

It was "Here, Trimmer, let me do that," or "Could n't I? How can you, Trimmer! You *know* I can hem!" or "Trimmer, if there's any darning to do I feel in the mood for it."

Christopher's absences were explanation enough for good Trimmer, who felt at a loose end herself. But explanations were excuses, for all that, and Mrs. Herrick knew it. Little boys at their first school do not work for very many hours. Christopher's absences were not so protracted as really to have left the day empty.

"I think you want change," Mrs. Oxeter said one day suddenly, out of the silence which hitherto she had preserved.

"I?" said Christopher's mother.

It was a new idea to her. Moreover, she still looked upon Boulogne itself as "change," forgetting how long she had been there. Change — of air, understood — always meant in domestic parlance Sea Air; — if, of course, it did not mean Going Abroad — and Boulogne was both.

Mrs. Oxeter watched her.

Laura and Catherine were out and her favourite daughter and she were alone in the Place Molière. How pretty she was, the old woman thought rather anxiously.

"What makes you think —?"

"My dear, I'm your mother."

"But I'm not ill."

"No, dear."

"Then why?"

"You're young," said Mrs. Oxeter shortly.

"Mamma!"

There was "How did you know?" in the tone. She was startled — scared even. Was her own discovery there in her face for others to read? She looked about her a little wildly.

The odd ornaments of the period filled the room. There was a hanging screen — a banner worked in Berlin wools — screwed to the mantelpiece. Upon the mantelpiece were some handsome Dresden figures, but each was under a glass shade. There were antimacassars on the backs of the chairs; albums on the tables; beaded footstools on the floor. There were things like these in the house in the Rue Gil Blas. A formal period in which to make any discoveries! The sight of these familiar things did not have the effect of calming her wholly. Was she already out of key with them? Her mother, in her cap with the mauve ribbons, fitted perfectly into her surroundings, hallowed them even, gave them point.

"Oh, I wish I were like you," she said.

"Towards the end because you find you have not passed the beginning?"

She had not known that she was going to speak.

"I've got Christopher," she heard herself saying in a low voice, "and I have Christopher's father, even if he's dead. He is n't dead to me. I've never stopped thinking about him. I watched Christopher growing, for both of us. I've never seen him in a new suit without thinking what Kit would have thought of it. I am growing him up, as it were, for his father — under his father's eyes, I've sometimes thought. It has n't been duty; it's been love — live love, I tell you, mother. And now at the sight of some one I have n't seen for years, and only cared for then as a friend, and never loved, I find myself no stronger than any silly schoolgirl."

Mrs. Oxeter did not speak. She was crocheting an antimacassar, — which was what women of all ages did then

for the occupation of their hands and thoughts, — exchanging patterns with one another, learning or teaching new stitches, — and she went on with her work, though it is doubtful whether her eyes could see it.

"It's dreadful," Christopher's mother said, — "dreadful!"

"It is n't even that I care now," she continued after a pause, during which she strove to control herself. "When I knew, — when I read it all in the papers, I mean, — it seemed so far off that it hardly concerned me; even when I realized suddenly that they were here. Why, when I saw them together for the first time it only gave me a little shock, — nothing that I could n't bear. I kept out of their way, that was all, and it seems that I was able to do this effectually, for he never saw me, — he did n't expect to, you see, — and he did n't even know who Christopher was, the day he was so kind to him. It was n't till I saw him face to face, and talked to him, and saw him with Christopher, — you don't know what his manner is with a child! — no, till after I knew that he knew I was here that . . . that this came to me, whatever it is. It was n't even then, quite. I can't explain. Not, I think, till after they were gone. It's all retrospective in a way. It's — oh, how can I explain when I don't understand, myself!"

She broke off, sobbing now in earnest. Mrs. Oxeter pushed her work aside and it fell to the floor, there to lie unheeded. She leant forward, but did not move from her chair.

"I'm — I'm so ashamed," Christopher's mother said.

"You've nothing to be ashamed of," Mrs. Oxeter said gently.

Christopher's mother shook her head. "Kit's being dead makes no difference —"

"Ah, my dear, my dear!"

"It does n't."

"I did n't mean that. Do you think you need tell me you loved Christopher's father? Do you think I don't know?"

Anne Herrick nodded.

"I know you know," she said brokenly.

"Yes," said Mrs. Oxeter, "I know that and all that you could tell me. I have n't lived to my age without knowing something of marriage. I've seen marriages, and perhaps one marriage — and that was yours. That was yours, Anne. But sooner or later we've all got to learn that we're human — with all the human failings and limitations and instincts. What you have been feeling is n't a reflection upon your loyalty to any one. Never think that. God made you, my dear, and be very sure that He knows."

It was the informing spirit of the formal room which was speaking, but with something more than the common understanding of the time.

"It is n't even exactly John Hemming," said Christopher's mother miserably. "It could n't be."

"But somehow because of him."

"Yes — other things helping."

"I know. It's just youth, dear, as I said first. You did n't know you were young."

"It's dreadful," said Christopher's mother.

"Not dreadful," said hers pityingly.

CHAPTER XI

ANNE HERRICK felt better after that. Nothing happened. What could? She had not a thought of John Hemming as an individual. He stood to her only for the sum of the things which had conspired to disturb her. That she should be liable to disturbance at all was disturbing enough in itself. If she was indeed young, why then she must make haste to grow older. She went so far as to order an elderly garment for the winter, but, to the satisfaction of her dressmaker, who had protested with hands and shoulders, consented at last to countermand it, before it was too late.

She played, however, with the idea of Change. An admission of weakness? An admission to youth, perhaps. Well, if you *were* young . . .

It could not be yet because of Christopher, whose studies must not be interfered with; but in the Christmas holidays? How would you like to go to London, Christopher? The Pantomime? The Crystal Palace? She could hear herself asking him; but did not ask yet, keeping the pleasure for a rainy day.

Autumn helped her, fires, the shortening days. The evenings were snug now with a book from Merridew's to beguile you. There had been giants on the earth so recently in those days, and there were still giants. Afterwards Christopher was to thrill to the names he heard then — not for their own sake always, but for the glamour which circumstances and association threw over them. So little earlier in the century and these had been new books by Old Masters. Think of it! Not that Christopher at his age was in a position to think of it, or that his mother even realised it. Books were books to her, generally enthralling, and, with the fire and the long evenings, a refuge. There

were magazines, too, to the appearing of which people with time on their hands, or even without, looked forward from month to month. So early a recollection of Christopher's was the yellow cover of " Cornhill,"and an advertisement of Somebody's Invalid Chairs intimately connected with it, — two footmen carrying a lady upstairs, — that there did not seem to be a time when that periodical had not a place in his life. We may suppose Christopher's mother, who had doubtless in their day followed the Adventures of Philip on His Way through the World, immersed about this period in those of Harry Richmond. Wonderful days. She was not unhappy. Change? Yes, later, perhaps; in the holidays.

Yet with no fear now of encountering disturbance on her walks she knew that she had been unhappy. It had been unnerving to know you might meet unrest at every corner. If Christopher had felt dismayed at the sight of an averted head, what of her who had decreed that it must be so averted! She had the double pain — nay, the treble. The knowledge that the coast was clear had not freed her at first, but now she was free.

She took long walks — with Christopher on half-holidays; often alone; occasionally with Trimmer, who, though she was not country-bred, liked to step out. The aunts were not for more than pottering. A walk to them was to a shop in the town, or to the end of the Port and back, or, with an effort, the top of the Grande Rue and a quarter of a mile of the Petits Arbres under the Ramparts. The Ramparts they thought lonely, dangerous even, as perhaps indeed they were; and the long stretch of the autumn sands too windy. It was never too windy for Christopher's mother.

So the time passed. If the lonely walks seemed purposeless, she called in thoughts of Christopher to help her — the snug evening, the lamp, the fire, the book. With glowing cheeks and sparkling eyes she would come back to her son and her fireside.

How think of your troubles — how have troubles when there was Christopher? He was growing visibly. Every day was declared to make a difference. People began to say of him to her that he must be becoming a companion, — "quite a companion to you," the exact phrase, — as if he had ever been anything else! One of these days he would have to go to school in earnest, and then — what then for her and even Trimmer? Not for a year or two yet, but some day for all that. Well, not yet.

"How would you like to go to England for Christmas?"

"England!"

Christopher, who had been lying on the rug, looking at pictures, rolled himself to sitting position.

"London," said his mother.

"Mummy!"

How would he like it? He flung himself upon her, danced round the room, shouted, sang. London! There was magic in the word for him even then. He had spent one excited night there on his way to Boulogne, in lodgings in Ebury Street — the lodgings, indeed, where he had stayed as a baby and where he was to have been born if things had not taken their wayward course in mid-ocean, — and we may suppose that he had registered impressions. Fog was one of them. A misty basement to which he had penetrated in search of Trimmer, another. In the basement, a servant in a skimpy cap, who sang, "Father, dear father, come home with me now," and gave Trimmer a jug of hot water, which he was permitted to see drawn from a great black kettle which sat upon a glowing fire. Another memory was of a toy which he had been given there — a windmill which turned its sails when you turned a handle, and into an upper chamber of which, from a little hut at its foot, a procession of little millers (glued to a tape) made an unending ascent. By an oversight this toy had been left behind. No wonder he remembered London. Might he run and tell Trimmer?

If he liked. Trimmer should come, too, if they went.

It was n't quite settled, but it was most likely. He scampered off. His mother heard him bounding up the stairs, calling Trimmer as he went. She heard his "Trimmer, we're going to London," and could guess at her "*What*, Master Christopher?" by his "We are. We are really. Ask mother."

Trimmer, nearly as excited as he, came down, apologising, to ask there and then.

"Oh, 'm, *really?*" she said.

Mrs. Herrick smiled.

"I think so. We're going to think about it, anyway. Don't you think perhaps a little change would be good for us all?"

"Yes, yes, yes," shouted Christopher.

"It would be nice, 'm," said Trimmer. "Oh, 'm, English bacon again. Only think!"

"Why, we have that here."

"And made as it were into a regular *plât*" (Trimmer said *plar*), "in the cooking. No. English bacon cooked by a Christian, I mean. Oh, 'm! And — and a muffin! To be sure, there's Gregory's, 'm, and 'owe's. But a London muffin with the bell going down the street. Oh, 'm!"

"I see we shall have to go," said Mrs. Herrick.

After that, for Christopher and for Trimmer it was counting the days. Plans matured rapidly enough. The time was fixed for the week before Christmas. Christmas itself was to be spent at Herrickswood with Christopher's other grandmother, who, informed of the projected visit, issued an invitation which amounted to a command. Herrickswood first, then, with a night in London on the way, and, then (Herrickswood appeased), an unfettered fortnight of London: such were the plans which took form while days were marked off a nursery calendar — crossed out with wetted pencil — and water ran under the bridges. "Christmas is Coming," sang Trimmer, as, in their several hours, she had sung "Rocked in the Cradle of the Deep,"

and the inflammatory "Marseillaise"; "Christmas will be here before we know where we are."

"We are going to England, to England, to England," sang Christopher; and even his mother's heart sang Change.

"You'll have to be very good at Grandmamma Herrick's."

"I don't mind," said Christopher.

He was ready to promise anything. Trimmer was best company now. She was going home for a few days in the course of the visit, and she never tired of telling of Birmingham, where her parents lived.

It was a fine city, she said, something like London, but nearly in the heart of the Black Country. The Black Country! Christopher breathed hard. Ah, he might well gasp. To go through that at night, Trimmer said, in the train, — between Birmingham, say, and Wolverhampton, — that was travelling, if you liked. Every chimney belched forth flame. Near and far, out of the darkness, you saw the great furnaces breathing. She did n't suppose there was anything like it in France. It always "reminded" Trimmer of hell. Not but what it was n't very pretty, too.

"It all seems alive," she said; "like Birmingham itself. Everything you can think of is made there. And all lit by gas."

"The houses?" said Christopher, wide-eyed.

At Boulogne, in such modest homes as that in the Rue Gil Blas, lamps were used — china lamps, burning colza oil, in sitting-rooms, and little benzoline lamps in the passages and bedrooms. It was Christopher's daily pleasure to watch these being trimmed. The china lamps had to be wound up like clocks (fascinating!); and the hand-lamps had their benzoline poured in and poured out of them, as much as was good for them being retained by sponges under wire netting. Very engaging, the trimming of the benzoline lamps!

"The houses?" said Christopher.

"Many of them. The streets, anyway."

It was n't so wonderful then.

"Just like here," said Christopher.

"There's gas-works near my 'ome," said Trimmer sentimentally, "and to see the moon over them on a summer's night — oh, there's nothing like England."

"Don't you wish you were going?" said Christopher to the Sons of the Nobility and Gentry at school.

All of them did; one or two were. These with Christopher formed a little envied group, puffed up with pride.

"I expect I shall have a lot to tell you when I come back," he said to his aunts.

"No doubt, darling."

"Don't you wish you —"

"If it was n't so cold," his Aunt Laura said; "at any other time of year," his Aunt Catherine. They, poor ladies, were indifferent sailors.

The time drew nearer and near. It was the week after next; — it was next week; — this; — it was to-morrow! Christopher was up with the lark — the winter lark, anyway.

It was very cold, and it was going to be rough. Every one said so. The aunts, who came down to see the travellers off, were congratulating themselves in earnest that they were not going. They hoped every few moments that their sister and Christopher, and Trimmer also, were well wrapped up.

"Have you rugs?" said Miss Oxeter.

"Has he enough over his chest?" asked Miss Catherine.

"Plenty of rugs — the woolly one and my big plaid. Christopher's all right, are n't you, dear?"

They chose their places on deck. Mrs. Herrick was a fair sailor — more or less safe, as she said, if she had air and might keep still. Christopher had yet to prove his mettle. Trimmer,who wanted a day to get her sea-legs, preferred on the whole to go below.

"It's different from India," she explained cryptically.

Christopher in his "reefer" coat stumped about the deck and made friends with the sailors. He was enormously interested in everything. The Paris train came in, and the packet filled up with hurrying laden folk with anxious eyes on the weather.

"It's going to be very rough," Christopher assured an old lady who seemed unable to get an answer to her question.

"Oh, you horrid little boy!" she said, smiling.

"You 'll see," said Christopher politely.

Like Trimmer, she went below. People made for the best places, held, or surrendered them. The timid and the uncertain — or perhaps the too certain — laid themselves out and closed their eyes. In the saloon into which Christopher peeped on his voyages of discovery there was already the smell of brandy. It was pleasant to get back into the air. Then a bell rang and his aunts made their hurried adieux. The last passenger scrambled on board, the gangways were drawn up, and they were off.

The piers slid by them.

It was Ho, for old England.

It was then that Christopher's mother asked herself, Why? In heaven's name, now that the danger was over — and had there been any danger, and if so of what? — in heaven's name, and the name of everything else that might be expected to understand the heart of woman and its incalculable and unfathomable workings: Why? Why? Why?

CHAPTER XII

CHRISTOPHER, sobered at first by the very distressing sights which he saw about him after the bar had been crossed, had gravitated to his mother's side and there ensconced himself comfortably under the large shawl which was known as the "plaid," from its odd sponge-bag pattern. There he stayed for some time with the wind and spray playing on his chubby face. One by one people about him were led below or staggered to the companion-ladder in a nameless race with time. When, however, he experienced no feelings of discomfort himself, and could thus be quite sure that he was not going to be ill, his energies took him to his feet again. He went and watched the engines and the water churned by the paddle-wheels, and the great waves which were doing such dire work amongst the passengers. He would have gone below to see how Trimmer was getting on, but that his mother, with some comprehension of what Trimmer's feelings might be just then, had told him she thought Trimmer would rather be left alone. It turned out afterwards that she had divined Trimmer's state only too accurately. Mrs. Herrick herself hoped, and expected, to be able to hold out.

Christopher, rather proud of himself, paced the deck with the hardy and intrepid, or stood amongst those who kept a lookout, caps pulled down over their eyes and their ulsters flapping round them. Beads of spray were on the rough nap of his coat, and on his face, as he could see others upon the clothes and faces, the beards and moustaches, of those about him. His lips were salt. Little sea-born boy, he felt entirely at home. The pulsing of the engines was in his ears as not so long ago, though he had no knowledge of this; it had smitten on the unheeding ears of his baby-

hood. Every loose thing flapped for his pleasure — his handkerchief when he drew that from his pocket to wipe the spray from his eyes; the sailors' oilskins; a newspaper caught on a rail; a lady's veil. The very noises of the straining vessel were for his enjoyment. Every now and then came a thud and the splash of falling water, and a funny protesting sound from the funnel, which seemed, shuddering, to fight for a moment for breath. There were creakings and raspings, swinging sounds like the sound made by the ropes of his swing at home over the beam in the granary. The wind whistled. It was as if he had always known these sounds.

People spoke to him. Some one held him up once to see the cliffs, but that was n't the least necessary, for the ship herself lifted you to see whatever there might be on the skyline. France had disappeared long since.

"You're a fine little sailor," said the pair of arms.

"I was n't sure if I should be," said Christopher, "but I was born at sea."

The cliffs, scarcely visible a short time back, began to mark themselves definitely on the horizon, the sea heaving, tossing, sliding, between. A thin gleam of sunlight broke through grey clouds. It made the day look colder.

Then a long time passed during which no particular progress seemed to be made, and then, suddenly as it seemed, gradually as it was in reality, there came a moment when simultaneously the passengers and the sailors began to be animated by something which spread from them through the ship. Laden people with pale faces — a faint pink upon the cheekbones — began to struggle up from the cabins. The enduring on deck opened their eyes, roused themselves, looked about them. Some performed an impromptu toilet or collected their luggage. As if to cheat sufferers of the sympathy which was their due the sea now began to go down. No one on this side would know or believe . . .

Christopher's mother welcomed him with triumphant

eyes. She had held out, but could not pretend to have enjoyed herself.

"Poor Trimmer!" she said.

The boat entered the harbour and slid to her moorings.

It was a very wan Trimmer who appeared then — smiling resolutely, however, and clasping her mistress's dressing-case.

"You ought to have stopped on deck, Trimmer," Christopher told her.

"Did I?" said Trimmer. But she managed to smile.

"One Woe is past, 'm," she said as she landed. "It's like the Book of Revelation. And English, 'm, — listen." (A porter had said, "Allow me, miss," another, "'Urry up with them things.") "English! Does n't it do your heart good, Master Christopher? I could kiss them all. It's worth Woes —though, mark you, I was near wishing we'd go to the bottom. And that more than once," she added.

"Poor Trimmer," said Mrs. Herrick again.

Tea in the train, with Protestant English buns (for the *brioches* of over the water), revived her; revived Christopher's mother; refreshed Christopher. Every one's spirits rose after that. The colour came back to Trimmer's cheeks. She could laugh at her sufferings. Christopher had never seen his mother herself in such spirits before. The holiday mood held the three of them.

After an hour of laughter and talking, they slept.

Victoria was Christopher's next conscious impression. Here were most of the laden travellers; the man who had lifted Christopher; the old lady to whom he had prophesied (she had forgiven him evidently, for she nodded to him and said, "*Did* I call you horrid? You were perfectly right"); the ill, the faint-hearted, the intrepid. There was some very cold waiting to the tune of goodness knows what-not of noise: an engine letting off steam — to take every "S" out of what you shouted or said; the rattle and clatter of vans, of metal on wood and on stone. Through

the hiss and the clamour would sound the shrill whistle of an out-going train with the loud *puff! puff! puff!* of its effort at starting. Stations, Christopher was to think afterwards, were noisier when he and the world were younger. But confusing as it all was, there was something stimulating in the very uproar.

"This is London," everything said; "this is London."

"Keep tight hold of my hand," said Trimmer. He could hardly hear her. "That's ours, 'm. Your big box. And here comes mine. Now where is the valise? Oh, this crowd and the noise, 'm! But anyway you can talk to the porters in your own language. Keep tight hold of my hand, Master Christopher."

It is to be feared that her charge, looking this way and that with fascinated eyes, strained at his leash.

Never had he seen so many top-hats. Even the station police wore them.

"There's the valise, 'm. There by that green carpet-bag — no, to the left. Near the 'ip bath. Now, perhaps we shall get along."

Gone everything of that period the way of yesterday's roses and snows. Christopher, if he had come to London for nothing else, was able to say that he remembered straw in the four-wheelers; stone paved roads; hatchments on the houses of the noble dead; the milkmaid — often elderly — of the sturdy legs, and the pails hanging from a yoke; many obsolete street-cries. Not all these did he see or hear on the short drive from Victoria to Ebury Street, but, whenever it may have been that they fixed themselves upon eye or ear, they stood to him afterwards as presenting the London of these remote, delightful, and unsophisticated days. There were still "grandeurs." Carriages were "turnouts." There were hammercloths. Coachmen wore wigs, footmen powder. What he chiefly noted in the cab was the straw, bits of which he picked off his mother's dress; and the deafening rattle of the windows which made

conversation almost impossible. These things he enjoyed all the same. They were London.

Never would he forget the meal which was ready for the travellers very soon after their arrival. Trimmer, sharing it for the occasion, said it did you good to see a chop that was n't a cutlet, and a vegetable which was n't a leg*u*me.

"A le-what?" said Christopher.

"Leg*u*me," said Trimmer.

Christopher had to correct her accent and go into the question of accuracy. If what Trimmer called leg*u*me *meant* vegetable, how could a vegetable help —

To Trimmer it was a question of the cooking.

"Oh, you two funny people," said Christopher's mother. "But I quite see what you mean," she said to Trimmer.

Trimmer need not have feared. There was nothing French about the cooking. There was an apple tart after the chops; cheese after that, — cheddar for Gruyère, to draw from Trimmer the inevitable comparison, — and with this meal they drank tea! No, nothing French about Ebury Street.

Trimmer retired presently to unpack for the night, but returned mysteriously not many minutes later.

"What do you think I've found?"

Christopher guessed breathlessly. He had hardly let himself hope.

Trimmer brought what she held from behind her back.

"The landlady kept it in case you should come here again. It's not even broken."

But was that it? — that his cherished memory? He got very red, and stood with his hands in his pockets. He had never felt so shamed. It was a toy for a baby!

His mother played with it after he had gone to bed.

He had hardly recovered from his discomfiture when Trimmer half an hour later came back to fetch him. After the adventurous day to have suffered such humiliation! He still played with toys. He would have admitted that.

Had he not ducks and fish of coloured tin (with a wonderful metallic smell) which followed a magnet about in a basin of water! Scarcely "older" these. He had leaden soldiers; tops; a painted ball even. But there *was* a difference. If Trimmer had even not treated the thing as a "surprise." "What do you think I've found, Master Christopher?" He should have known better than to respond to that. Trimmer should know better than to lay such a trap for him — should have realised.

But London came to his rescue. Unfamiliar sounds reached him from the street; the song of a drunken man — something about Champagne Charlie; the rattle of cabs and carriages; a postman's knock; the cry of a newspaper-boy; the passing of many feet. London was going on all round him. It was in the flicker of the firelight on the walls, in the feel of the strange bed, the pleasant restfulness of the cold, clean sheets; the very griminess of the ceiling which wanted whitewashing so badly. It was in the sound of a piano being played somewhere not far off; in the drip of water in a cistern at the top of the stairs; in the candles which had lighted him to bed. Above all, it was in a rumble, like the roar of the waves on the sands at Boulogne, which seemed to be behind every other sound and which went on all the time without ceasing. In the absorbing interest of these things he forgot his humiliation. He could feel the bed going up and down now, like the boat, but very pleasantly. It was rocking him gently to sleep.

He woke to see his mother bending over him.

"It shows how much older and bigger I am, anyway."

"What does, darling?"

He could n't remember, and was asleep again.

CHAPTER XIII

HERRICKSWOOD had been a big place in its time, and even now, shorn of most of its acres by the extravagance of dead and gone Herricks, was of considerable importance in its own county. It was of paramount importance in the eyes of its owner. There had always been Herricks of Herrickswood. It was a big square house of imposing front and the many charming inconveniences incidental to its age. There was tapestry and there were draughts in many of the bedrooms. The house stood in a small park, which, in the days of its former glories, had been a big one. There had been deer in the reign of Christopher's grandfather, but were none now. There were fine trees: beech, chestnut, oak. An avenue of the second led from the nearer of the two lodge gates to the house. The road from the farther, by which, as the more direct from the station, our travellers were driven upon their arrival, ran through bracken-covered slopes, past a lake, a larch plantation, a round building which had been kennels and was now empty, and presently a little private chapel.

Herrickswood, beautiful as it was, always oppressed Christopher's mother, who knew that it was by reason of its existence — since everything else was equal and the Oxeters as old a family as the Herricks — that she had not been thought a good match for Christopher's father. Herrickswood was the outward and visible sign of the Herricks' position. There, as Squires, Justices of the Peace, Guardians of the Poor, as High Sheriffs from time to time, or Lord Lieutenants of their county, they had lived, doing well or ill, — ill as often as not, — but in the sight of all. The Oxeters, on the other hand, if of a stock no less respectable, had no such sign. Granny Oxeter used to say with

a chuckle that her daughters were privileged to wear cousins' mourning for half the deaths recordable in Burke and Debrett, but much good might that do them! As a family the Oxeters were of that large company of the well-born of whom it might be said that they are perpetually the collaterals of the great. Their men marry the more obscure of their social equals, or frankly "beneath" them; their women, younger sons. Christopher's father was a younger son; his mother, herself daughter of a younger son of the younger son of a peer, had so far carried out the traditions of her own peculiar state.

Mrs. Herrick met her daughter-in-law and her grandson in the frowning hall, which, as Anne Herrick felt and had always felt, need not so have frowned. A little less austerity in the decorations, and the hall at Herrickswood might have welcomed all comers smiling. If, however, the hall frowned, Christopher's Herrick grandmother upon this occasion did not. She gave the newcomers warm if short welcome, and led them into her sitting-room. She walked with a stick.

Christopher, observing her and everything else, followed her solemnly in the wake of his mother, while Trimmer, casting a glance after them, disappeared with the servants through a large baize-covered door at the end of a passage.

There was nothing austere about the room into which Mrs. Herrick ushered her guests. A bright fire burned in the grate and twinkled in the glass in the frames of the many pictures on the walls, and in and on the surfaces of many shining things.

Mrs. Herrick pulled an armchair round to the fire for her daughter-in-law.

"Now, let me look at you," she said to Christopher.

He submitted to her scrutiny with not more flinching than might be.

"He's more like you than like us," his grandmother said at length, without withdrawing sharp eyes from his face.

"We think him like his father," Christopher's mother said.

"Well, perhaps."

"His eyes."

"He has your mouth. None the worse for that, eh, Christopher?"

Christopher said, "No."

She did not say whether what she saw pleased her, but signing him to a stool by the fire, turned to her daughter-in-law and asked about her journey.

The butler and a footman appeared now with cakes and wine. Christopher was bidden to eat, which he did with good appetite. The butler was told to pour out half-a-glass of sherry for him. He drank it, coughing a little. After that he was given some Views of the Rhine to look at, and by the time he had gone through them twice he was ready for some other diversion. This was not immediately forthcoming, so he wandered round the room; looking at things which he wanted to touch but did not, and being careful to make no noise.

"He will dine with us to-night, Anne."

"If you're good enough to let him."

"Pooh! Would you like to, Christopher?"

Christopher said, "Yes," and added "Please" for manners.

"Well, then, now you'd like to see your rooms. Will you ring that bell, Christopher?"

Very wide stone steps led from the austere hall to the landing above. It seemed to Christopher that miles of passage had to be passed before the room was reached in which Trimmer was now unpacking.

"The young gentleman's room is next door," said the butler, "the dressing-room, as it were, to yours, 'm," and withdrew.

Trimmer told of the splendours below. It was all much as she remembered it on an earlier visit years ago, only

"grander" if anything. Mrs. Herrick's maid Ollenshaw was still in office, and, would you believe, wore a silk gown, if you please, 'm. She was a very haughty person, but had not, it seemed, forgotten Trimmer, to whom she was all that was affable — "affability impersonified," Trimmer said. She had a sitting-room to herself now — with a piano in it; at least, one of those old-fashioned tall ones, with faded silk spreading in rays like, from a rosette in the middle. It had yellow keys — the sort, Trimmer said, amongst which some were generally found to be dumb. But it gave the room "a hair, as you might suppose." There was a sofa, too, on which Trimmer and Ollenshaw had sat while they drank their tea and ate 'ot buttered toast, which was brought to them by one of the servants. Trimmer shaking out dresses, patting, folding, and putting away, could not, she said, help but smile as she thought of it.

"There we sat, 'm, for all the world like imitation ladies. It was, 'A little more tea, Miss Trimmer,' and, 'May I pass you the toast?' Very nice for a change, 'm, but enerviating, I should say, in the long run."

She lifted back the tray of her mistress's box.

"Most of the old servants are still here. The old butler only died last year, and the coachman who was here before, he's been pensioned off. But Mrs. Wellington is still here, 'm, — the housekeeper, if you remember, and the cook, and the head-housemaid — who must be nearly sixty. And *they*, 'm, are all agog to see Master Christopher, 'm."

Trimmer lowered her voice for what she said next.

"Mr. Stephen, it seems, has n't been seen or been heard of for six months."

Christopher, looking round, saw his mother frown at her.

He found his grandmother's eyes upon him more than once at dinner, which was rather a solemn meal. His mother did most of the talking. His grandmother carved. Christopher, a little awed by the grave butler and the two foot-

men with the wooden faces, did not have to be told that boys should be seen and not heard.

He said, "Yes, please," to many excellent things, and did not dispute a vicarious "No, thank you," of his mother's to some tempting dish which had paused deferentially at his elbow upon its second round. It was then that something happened — the smallest thing in the world.

"H'm," said his grandmother.

That brought a "Yes?" from his mother.

"I said 'H'm,'" said his grandmother, "and meant it. He's not the fighter his father was."

His mother smiled a little anxiously.

"He's on his best behaviour," she said; "are n't you, Christopher?"

Christopher looked from one to the other.

"Need n't I be? Have n't I got to?"

His grandmother laughed out.

"I'd like some more, then," he said boldly.

Was it instinct or young memory which had taught him how to treat her?

His grandmother said nothing, but something was relaxed. He felt it. His mother felt it. After that he talked as much as he would have talked at home. Dinner lost its portentous solemnity.

Long after Christopher had gone to bed his grandmother and his mother sat talking.

"Your letter telling me you were coming to England nearly crossed one from me. I was on the point of writing to you."

Anne glanced up from her work. She, like Mrs. Oxeter, was crocheting an antimacassar.

"It was time I saw my grandson," said Mrs. Herrick. She was a fierce-looking old woman on whose face time had written inscrutable things.

"I'm so glad you should see him now. I've wanted you to see him. I was waiting, in a way. I did n't think you liked children."

"I don't."

They were back now in the room into which the two had been ushered upon their arrival. Christopher's grandmother looked at the fire, which, though it had evidently just been made up, did not seem to please her. She put on a loose velvet glove which hung by a loop from a nail in the wall, and taking up the poker, poked, raked out, and rearranged the coals. She threw another log on to them from a box which stood beside the hearth.

"I don't like children," she repeated. "I never did — except my own — and they grew up."

It may have been a little movement which her daughter-in-law made which caused her to consider her words.

She took off the glove and hung it up in its place over the coal-box.

"I'm alone in my old age," she said grimly. "One of my sons is dead — oh, I know I did n't entirely want him to marry you. I admit it. But you made him a good wife, and I'm glad now that he did marry you. He's dead for all that — and the other might just as well be."

The old eyes blazed suddenly as they looked into the fire. The fingers with the many rings as suddenly were clenched, and Anne Herrick, by the flashing of the stones, saw how they were trembling.

"Let him take care, though," she heard her mother-in-law add under her breath. "Let him take care."

She made no comment. She could not, as Christopher's mother, discuss Christopher's ne'er-do-well uncle with one who not only was incensed, but had so much in her power. In spite of her, her heart beat a little quicker, for never before had the thought of Herrickswood in connection with her own son crossed her mind. That Mrs. Herrick by the foresight of her husband had the disposal of it at her unfettered pleasure she had always known; but that she might ever think of passing over her own son, was a thought which had never so much as occurred to her.

"I've paid his debts for him three times," the angry old woman was saying. "I've kept him out of the bankruptcy court, and for what? To contribute to the support of disreputable women, to enable him to bet and gamble and drink, and for my pains to be left for months at a time without so much as his address."

She paused, and a little gleam of humour shot into the sharp eyes.

"That's, all the same, his one redeeming virtue — the one thing that keeps his name in my will at all: his indifference to my hold over him. He makes it no hold, and so the strongest. He knows what I can do if I choose, and he has the impudent courage to flout me. There must be some wisdom in a man who can be such a fool."

"I always liked him," said Christopher's mother.

"All women do. Good women as well as bad — goodness knows you're good enough, dear. That's, in a way, what's the matter with you."

Christopher's mother laughed — relieved that she might show colour in a situation which had demanded neutrality, at least, from her.

"A spice of the Devil would have done you no harm — a little more of the guile of the serpent. If Christopher has either, he won't get it from you."

"He's not such a paragon," said his mother. She smiled at the thought of this being praise.

"I hope not, but I hope more that he'll never be anything else in essentials."

What these might be she did not say.

"What are his tastes?" she asked abruptly.

Anne Herrick felt herself nonplussed. His tastes? How could she say? — though she thought she knew. How explain to this stern old woman, who expected men to be soldiers, that she believed Christopher to be many other things? She did not forget the wartime when Christopher had been martial with the most martial. She did not forget many a little incident in his little career which showed

that he was not wanting in pluck — facings of pain, the dentist, perhaps, facings of what had to be faced, but might have been shied at. These things did not count. She did not think he was a soldier. His tastes? Everything was his taste. A walk with Christopher would have told you more than she could tell.

"I don't know," she said at last. "He's interested in everything." (She was using, though she did not know it, almost the words Trimmer had used to the piano-tuner, when she in turn had tried to express Christopher.) "There 's nothing that he does n't see. He sees pictures."

"An artist?"

Mrs. Herrick's tone was tolerant in a contemptuous sort of way.

"I don't know. He's taking in all the time. Taking in everything he hears and smells and sees and touches —"

"And tastes, I hope. Give him a good appetite. It's healthier then."

His mother nodded.

"He uses all his senses for what he is absorbing."

"Well, if the rarest of all — the one we call common — is not left out — "

Anne Herrick smiled.

"I don't think it is. He has plenty of gumption. But if he sees things as they are, he also sees them as they never were and never will be."

"You're drawing an artist, I misdoubt me."

"He has n't an idea of drawing. He draws, of course, — but only what all children draw, — trains, and houses, and unrecognisable horses. Not a bit better than any other boy of his age. Not a painter, I think, if you mean that. I don't understand these things, but it seems to me sometimes that with so much taking-in, one of these days there will have to be some sort of giving-out."

"An artist," Christopher's grandmother said again. "I did n't mean a painter."

There was a pause after that.

"I suppose you know that it's putting him outside life."

"Or in the heart of it."

"So deeply in the heart of it, then, that it will keep the breath from his nostrils. Well, it's all as it will be. Neither you nor I will have any voice in what was settled from the beginning of time. I hope you may be wrong — for his sake. But meanwhile I could find it in me to wish something which may surprise you."

Anne Herrick looked at her, speculating as to what that might be.

Mrs. Herrick the elder did not answer at once. She looked at her daughter-in-law much as she had looked at Christopher. Anne let her eyes fall to her work and went on with it. Her crochet-hook pecked away at the rose she was making. She felt the old woman's eyes on her hair, on her cheeks, on her eyelids; most of all on her eyelids. She was not as strong as Christopher, who had hardly flinched.

"Well?" she said at last.

"It is n't because you're so pretty, and prettiness should n't be wasted. I daresay you scarcely know how pretty you are. And it is n't because you're young, though you are amazingly young when I look at you —"

"Oh, please."

Anne Herrick could not stifle that little cry.

"It is n't for your sake at all," Mrs. Herrick continued relentlessly. "Though it might be and might very well be, it is n't. It's Christopher I'm thinking about."

"I know what you're going to say —"

"Well, then, has it ever occurred to you that a household of women is n't the best environment for him? We're narrow, the broadest of us, circumscribed, hemmed in as much by our own ignorances as by anything else. It won't always be so, perhaps. There are signs even now of a breaking-down of some of the barriers. Whether that will be good for us I for one am not prepared to say. The fact remains that we're not called the weaker sex for

nothing. Well, there are weaknesses that I pride myself upon not having, and this is one of them. Most women think that their sons' widows should be widows indeed. Well, I don't, and if ever —"

"Ah, please —"

"Nonsense, you're a young woman."

That was what Christopher's mother had so lately discovered, and what for that very reason she did not want to hear. She held her breath for the strangeness of the moment.

"I'm thinking of Christopher. Where there's a boy there should be a man. There's nothing —"

"Don't say 'like a man in the house,'" Anne implored, laughing a little hysterically.

"Well, that's what I was going to say," said Christopher's grandmother.

CHAPTER XIV

THE next day was Christmas Eve. There had been a very hard frost in the night and every puddle was frozen. Christopher may be said to have spent most of the morning breaking cat-ice with a sturdy boot, and canvassing for votes for hard weather. He was hoping for snow, though at breakfast his grandmother had said fervently, "The Lord forbid!" If not snow, then a spell of frost for sliding — perhaps even for learning to skate. The frost, Robson, the butler, and Mrs. Wellington, the housekeeper, seemed disposed, though a little too indulgently, to promise him. It appeared to be because boys would be boys — or, more aptly, young gentlemen, young gentlemen — that they supposed, with obliging smiles, that he must have it. His mother, who, in her heart, was rather wishing too that the frost might last, went down with him to look at the lake. She had not skated for many years, but used to skate — when she was "young," as a short time back she would have expressed it — when she was a girl, before she married, that is, as, for some reason or another, she was moved to put it now.

The lake was well covered. Clean ice shimmered in clear sunlight. Already, private as the park was, with only a right of way across it by a distant footpath, the stone or two of wantonness or active mischief lay upon the ice. But what ice if the frost held out! She felt excited and again a little bit alarmed.

What was this conspiracy that insisted on her youth? The very sight of the ice joined it — the sharp, stimulating air. What, too, was this mystery of recurring phrases? Words seemed to group themselves arbitrarily on the tongue to disconcert her. There 's nothing like . . . Could

any reiteration of chance words be stranger? Were they chance words at all which had it in them so to force themselves upon her? Christopher, even, — Christopher, all unconscious, passive, innocent of any design soever, — had been drawn into the disturbing argument they pressed. Had she fled to England but to be confronted with them in a new and strengthened guise? Something seemed to her to be closing round her.

"Come here, Christopher."

He came — from breaking cat-ice. A cart-road, deeply rutted, skirted the lake, and the ruts were ridged as with glass near where she was standing. He could break to his heart's content. He held a bit of ice in each hand. His cheeks were glowing.

"What, mother?"

She did not know, and made some excuse — told him to look at a robin which had alighted almost at her feet.

"Is n't he tame?"

She had meant to ask him questions. Some impulse, which as suddenly as it came deserted her, had prompted her to ask him whether he was happy. Was his life happy — his normal life at Boulogne with only herself and Trimmer for everyday companionship? For change and interchange of ideas outside his home, were his schoolfellows enough for him? What good to ask him? Of course he was happy; and how could he know? If he were not happy, even, how could he know?

The robin took flight and Christopher went back to his cat-ice.

But even as she dismissed her questions came a recollection to answer them. Christopher bending over a rut had unconsciously put himself into the first position for one of the acrobatic feats which he used to perform with poor Pierre About in the magic days of the billeting. Monsieur Christophe was told to stoop down, — lower, lower, — now from between his knees to give Pierre, who stood behind him, his hands, so: then, *Houp-la! Houp!* had been

made to turn a somersault. It was Pierre, of course, who did the performing. Christopher had only to have faith; not to be frightened. There were other evolutions through which he was put. He had stood on Pierre's shoulders one day, held only (though Jean Poulard was there ready, if he should fall, to catch him) — held only by Pierre's hands at the back of his heels. It had been Christopher's mother that day who was frightened, not Christopher, — though he was not sorry to come down.

That was life, perhaps. That was life for a boy. Happy, healthy, natural. She had only to think of Christopher as he had borne himself then to realise that, full as his young life might be, it had been fuller for this time than it had been before or since. Yet, when all was said, how do better than well?

She laughed to herself presently, her spirits rising again as she raced him towards the house.

"We shall be skating in three days," she said, "and then you won't beat me."

"Well, I've got to learn," he said. "Then I shall beat you, all right."

"Shall you indeed, sir? And why, pray?"

"Oh, well," said Christopher, "I'm — well, you're not a boy, you see."

"And all boys can beat their mothers?"

"On their legs," said Christopher, "of course."

Which was all as it should be. They reached the house laughing and breathless.

Mrs. Herrick the elder did not reopen the subject of her talk with her daughter-in-law that day — nor would, perhaps, during the rest of the visit. She had said her say, maybe, and would leave her words to soak in. Anne, enjoying herself, in spite of misgivings and forebodings, more than she had expected, and somehow no longer "oppressed" by Herrickswood, gave herself up to the very simple pleasures of the moment, and hoped so. She went for a

drive in the afternoon and assisted Mrs. Herrick in the distribution of her rather fierce Christmas doles.

"Here's a pound of tea and a pound of sugar, Jane Jarman, and a Happy Christmas to you, and don't let me hear of your husband being drunk again, or tell him I'll look out for a new woodman."

"Yes, 'm. Yes, 'm; thank you kindly, and no, 'm, I'm sure. And I'm sure I 'ope —"

"Yes, Jane Jarman, I know. Well, just tell him. And don't let the tea stoo. Good-day to you."

"Good-day, 'm, and I'm sure I 'ope . . ."

"The cottage by the forge, James."

Or, "Here's half-a-crown, Mrs. Holden, and what's this I hear about your daughter? Let her understand once for all that I won't have any scandal. If you can't control your children, you've no right to have had any. Not a word. I won't listen to any excuses. None to make for her? Well, all I can say is you ought to have. There. There. The usual wishes."

Sometimes the attack came first.

"Your sons are poachers and thieves, Enoch Jones. They're a disgrace to the parish. I hear fine accounts of them. It's not their fault, I'm told, that they're not spending Christmas in prison this year. It's a pity they're not, if what I hear's true, and then people's pheasants might hope to spend theirs in Christian safety. Mind this, though. I'll show them no mercy if my keepers catch them. You ought to be ashamed of yourself, you wicked old man. What happened to Eli, eh, in the Scriptures? He fell off a post, did n't he, to punish him for his sons' evil courses, and so will you if you don't check yours on theirs. You may well look down. How's your little granddaughter?"

"She don't seem to get up her strength."

"Send up to the hall for some soup. Perhaps she could eat a little jelly. I'll speak about it. Here's a parcel of groceries for you. I should wish you a happy Christmas

with more certainty of your getting it if you'd brought up your sons better. Good day, Enoch Jones."

"Good day, 'm, and thank you gratefully, and a Merry Christmas and many of 'em."

"Merry Christmas, indeed," snorted Christopher's grandmother to his mother. "Merry — with Stephen in some gutter! I suppose I ought to fall off a post myself. It's lucky I'm not given to sitting on anything so risky."

So they proceeded. It was, "Where's the list, my dear? Have you marked those off? That's right. Good-for-nothings, all of them. Who's next then?" The oddest old woman! But when amongst the gifts for an old Irish widow, one Biddy McFlood, without any belongings, a twist of tobacco was seen to have found its thoughtful place, — although it was shot at her with a Faugh! and For shame to you! — Christopher's mother wondered how she could ever have stood in awe of her mother-in-law.

Christopher meanwhile, who had stayed at home to help to decorate the house for the morrow, was pricking his fingers with holly leaves, hammering his thumbs, and generally enjoying himself. A spirit of festivity was over even the austere hall. It was there that, with the aid of Albert, the other wooden-faced footman, Robson, the butler, hung the branch of mistletoe which caused such a flutter amongst those of the women servants who were helping. The elderly head-housemaid, who had so many front teeth when she smiled that Christopher wondered how her lips managed to cover them when she did n't, said — in answer to nothing, as far as Christopher knew — that James or Albert had Better let Her see them Try, *that* was all! Ollenshaw, making a garland of evergreens with Trimmer, said, "Ah, in the old days when we used to have annual servants' balls here, that was the time. Some use in mistletoe then. Some meaning, as you might say."

It was all very respectful and discreet. An apologetic glance was thrown at Christopher if any one laughed at all

loudly, but he was not excluded from the festal jesting, and took his own part in it.

"Trimmer 's young man is at Boulogne," he said.

"Now, Master Christopher!"

"He is. He's a piano-tu—"

Trimmer's laughing hand covered his mouth.

There was a friendly scuffle. But the thing seemed to give general pleasure. It was interpreted in some way as proving Master Christopher a son of the house — proud (Heaven knew how!), but able and ready to descend from his natural pedestal. He reminded Ollenshaw of his father, of course, but of his grandfather, too, and of his great-uncles.

"I hardly realised, 'm," Trimmer said afterwards to her mistress. "I did n't indeed."

"Realised what?"

"What they think it, to be one — a Herrick, I mean."

"He's an Oxeter, too."

"I don't forget that. But in this house, 'm — the importance! Of course I always knew — his father's son and being posthumious, as I said at the time, I remember. But this brings it 'ome." Trimmer lowered her voice again. "He 's winning golden opinions, 'm. Ollenshaw tells me his grandmamma's taken to him most extraordinary. *She* hears, 'm, having her ear, as it were. Indeed, in the housekeeper's room he 's as good as looked upon as the —"

But that, Christopher's mother would not hear. She felt it her duty to speak rather sharply. That was not to be said. Not to be thought even. The case was nothing of the sort. If such an idea were put into the boy's head —

"No, 'm, of course not. Who would dream?"

Trimmer was not a bit abashed.

"Don't let me hear anything more of this, or I shall be very angry."

The decorations betokened no special festivities. Herrickswood was always decorated at Christmas. Festoons

of evergreens decked the sombre hall every year, hanging from point to point on the walls. Bunches of holly were tucked behind the frames of the pictures, crowning them or balancing themselves on each side of them. Mrs. Herrick might be glad enough to see these things cleared away when they had served their purpose, but she would as soon have thought of not having them as of absenting herself without adequate reason from church, on the twenty-fifth of December. Customs were habits in those days.

The work went on apace. There was a rustling and a crackling of leaves. The big garland, on which the maids had been employed in their spare time for the last few days, was in its place between the two pilasters; and the smaller ones were growing apace under Ollenshaw's and Trimmer's deft fingers. Christopher alternately helped and hindered. He had made friends with wooden Albert now, and discovered that he was not wooden. Albert had many accomplishments which you would not have dreamt of attributing to him if you had only seen him waiting. He could move his ears and his scalp. Very accomplished, this! He could wink, and taught Christopher — with, however, a caution. But above all, he was a ventriloquist.

He called, "Are you there?" into an empty cupboard under the great stone stairs, and a voice came out of it, saying, "Of course I am, and who's that young gentleman 'olding the 'olly?"

"What young gentleman?"

"Why, standing beside you, stupid!"

"He means you, Master Christopher."

After that the voice of the man in the empty cupboard, who dropped his H's so thoroughly, had to be evoked for Christopher from everywhere else that Christopher could think of: from the gallery overhead; from the dining-room and the library, and the great cold drawing-room which nobody sat in.

"Can you, Robson?"

Robson, smiling indulgently, had other things to do, than waste his time.

"Can James?"

No, James could n't either; but it appeared that James was "proficient" upon the melodeon, a sort of concertina. Christopher thought the baize door shut off many delights.

The sound of the returning carriage put a stop to the entertainment. The servants, who had gathered round to listen, went back to their several employments; Trimmer and Ollenshaw to their garlands, the maids to their snippings and prunings; while Robson, whipping in Albert with a look, nipped down the ladder upon which he had been standing, and hastened to the door.

Mrs. Herrick, pausing on her stick to look round, said, "A nice mess, I must say. Have you helped, Christopher? Has he, Ollenshaw?"

"Of the greatest assistance, 'm.

His grandmother smiled at him.

"Enjoyed yourself?"

Christopher had done that, too.

He followed his mother upstairs to tell her about Albert.

But his mother could hardly listen to him; for odder even than the odd reiteration of disturbing words, stranger than the realisation of youth which had lately been forced upon her, was the news which she had just heard in the carriage.

John Hemming, it seemed, was in England, — nothing surprising in that; was in the neighbourhood, — not wholly surprising, this, either, for it was in that part of the world, though at the other side of the county, that she had first met him; was coming to dinner next day.

And that, to Anne Herrick, was rather more than surprising.

CHAPTER XV

It was representative of the difference at that time in the attitude of society towards the male and the female transgressor, that, while the tip of Mrs. St. Jemison's nose would not have been allowed to show itself over the threshold of Herrickswood, John Hemming could be asked to dinner without any ado soever. It would not, indeed, have occurred to Mrs. Herrick the elder that upon a point so well established any tentative sounding of the guest already installed, as to whether she had any objection to meeting him, could be deemed necessary.

Anne, conscious of being taken aback, was conscious also that this very difference of outlook marked the relative worldly positions of her mother-in-law and herself. It was a question of upbringing. She herself would have felt bound to "ask" before asking. Town and country mouse, she felt, were adumbrated: here you saw the Mrs. Herrick who lived in the world, and the Mrs. Herrick who, in so far as she did not see eye to eye with her in this matter, plainly lived out of it.

But in truth it was not upon such points of observance that she was troubled. There was more than this to disturb her. She heard thus hardly more than a word or two of what Christopher had followed her upstairs to tell. She said, "Did you, darling?" and "Really!" and "You don't mean it!" relevantly enough. But whether Albert was a ventriloquist, a contortionist, or a Primitive Methodist she could not have told afterwards — or, indeed, whether it was Albert at all that she had been hearing about, and not Robson or the elderly housemaid or Ollenshaw. Somebody had done something, she knew, and she must see or must hear him — or her. Christopher, however, did not realise her inattention, and presently left her.

She stood by her dressing-table in her hat and coat and looked at, without seeing, herself in the glass. The fire crackled and spluttered and blew out puffing jets of flame and boiling "tar" in the grate behind her. The sound of it was the only sound in the room. It marked the passing moments with little flares of ardent gas. Anne heard them and thought the noise was like the running sound of the knife-grinder's wheel when he holds the blade to it at intervals in its revolutions. Automatically she had lighted the candles on each side of the looking-glass, and now, as automatically, she put them out, and drawing back a curtain looked out over the park.

The frozen ground looked white, almost as if the snow, for which Christopher had been wishing, had come indeed. The sky was very clear and, in the early winter evening, full of stars. The trees were very dark in the pale light, and against the sky the branches of a cedar near the house looked as if they were cut out of black paper. That gleam to the left ringed by darkness must be the lake. The evening was very still. Bells suddenly rang out faintly upon the stillness, or it may be that suddenly she became aware of their distant ringing. They reminded her of other Christmas Eves.

She opened her window to listen, and as she did so another sound smote crisply upon her ear — the sound of hoofs. Presently she made out the shape of a horse and a rider upon the road below. She watched its progress across the park to where it disappeared from her sight at the corner of the house.

It was about five minutes later that a note was brought to her by Trimmer.

"For me?" she said. "It is n't a telegram?" She had a momentary fear that something must have happened. Her mother was ill, or one of her sisters.

"No, 'm. It's a note by messenger."

Trimmer looked for the matches, found them, and lighted the candles.

"It must be for Mrs. Herrick," said her mistress. She had taken the note and was waiting for the light to burn up.

"No, 'm. Robson said it was for you."

The flames of the candles settled to steady burning and showed the name on the envelope to be Mrs. Christopher Herrick.

Still Anne hesitated, persuaded that there must be some mistake. She knew no one about there likely to write to her. There were, of course, people whom she had met or who had called upon her years ago. It was possible that one of these might have written, but it was improbable. She was sure the note, whatever its direction, must be for her mother-in-law.

Trimmer waited.

"Robson did n't say where it was from?"

"No, 'm. He only said it was for you. I gathered somehow, though he did n't say so, that the messenger had been given particular instructions."

It was a good many years since Anne Herrick had seen the handwriting on the envelope or she would have recognised it, perhaps, but even as she broke the seal she did so, and knew in the same moment what she should find within. She held the sheet to the light, and, steadying her eyes with an effort, read the few lines it contained.

"I have just heard you are at Herrickswood. You will believe that I did not know you were to be there when, with my father, I accepted Mrs. Herrick's invitation to dine with her on Christmas Day. I place myself in your hands. I will go to-morrow evening, or send excuse, according as you bid me."

There was no beginning and no end.

"Is the messenger waiting?"

"Yes, 'm."

Anne Herrick went over to a writing-table, without an idea of what she was going to write. Her first impulse was to say, Do not come. Yet to what good? She was, moreover, still so far in awe of her mother-in-law as to shrink from

interfering in any of her arrangements. What more likely than that the coming of this messenger would reach her ears? In such a case, as things stood, easy enough, in view of what had scandalised Boulogne so recently, to explain. But if the "excuse" came first, and the hearing of the note afterwards, a connection between the two would be obvious, an explanation unavoidable, and Christopher's grandmother would, she thought, be a difficult person to whom to make admissions. She must either consult her hostess or let her hostess's guest come. She made her decision.

"I understand," she wrote, "and am grateful. But please come as you intended."

She let this stand, folded the sheet, enclosed it in an envelope which she addressed, and gave it to Trimmer.

"The note was for me," she said.

Christopher was not sitting up for dinner that night. It had been arranged in the interests of his bedtime that he should have tea with Trimmer in the housekeeper's room, and so retire at his usual hour. He came in to dessert for a few minutes and was given a fig and a tangerine orange to eat there and then, and some chocolates to take up with him, so he went to bed a full and happy boy. His mother and his grandmother sat on for a little while after he had left them, and then went as before to Mrs. Herrick's sitting-room. Anne, who had been waiting all through dinner for the mention of John Hemming's name, was the first to speak it. She had decided that she must tell Mrs. Herrick of her recent meeting with him at Boulogne. As Christopher would see him at dinner the next day, she had, indeed, no alternative. As well, then, speak of the note and make no mysteries.

"At Boulogne, were they?" said Mrs. Herrick. "Well, just the sort of place where one would expect to find them, poor things. There's the wide world to choose from, and they go to Boulogne! There's a fate in it. If it had n't been Boulogne, it would have been Brussels or Bruges."

"We thought of Brussels or Bruges ourselves," said Anne Herrick smiling, "when mamma gave up Cheltenham."

Mrs. Herrick made no comment on this, but looked amused.

"So they fixed on Boulogne, did they, and fluttered your dovecots?"

"Well, every one knew. That was why one could n't do anything — even after his kindness about Christopher. He came at once to see him when I wrote, and I have to thank him, in a way, for Christopher's recovery."

"You'll be able to do that to-morrow."

"I shall be glad to have the opportunity. He kept out of our way after his visit, and soon afterwards they went away."

"Have you heard anything of him since?"

"Not till to-day — not till you spoke of him this afternoon and I got his note this evening."

"Do you know that they've separated?"

Anne Herrick put down the magazine the pages of which she had been cutting.

"Separated!" she said.

"Well — she," said Mrs. Herrick.

Anne looked her amazement.

"But are n't they going to be married?" she asked at last.

The words as she spoke them showed her how completely impersonal had her thoughts been. John Hemming, as John Hemming, had not entered into them. In so far as she had thought of him, though the sight of him had so greatly disturbed her, she had thought of him as another woman's husband — removed, apportioned, out of any reckoning. It was not of him, then, that she had been afraid, but of all men by reason of him; since it was the sight of him which had revealed to her that she was young still, and a woman.

"The whole thing is extraordinary," Mrs. Herrick said. "First, St. Jemison, who is a beast, — though that's by

the way and justifies nothing, — won't divorce her. Vindictiveness, nothing else, for he had no thought of taking her back, — and they are kept dangling by his perversity for goodness knows how long. And then, when at length he does, and the time is approaching for the decree to be made absolute, off goes the lady with somebody else."

Anne could hardly take this in. She began two or three sentences, all beginning with But.

"My dear, it's because you can't put yourself in her position. You've been feeling, just because you could n't call upon her, and because she showed something more perhaps than just common humanity when Christopher met with his accident, — knelt in the dust and did n't consider her pretty clothes and all that, — that she was a deeply suffering woman. You yourself in her position — if you ever could be in her position, which you could n't! — would be miserable. Therefore she was. Not a bit of it. Oh, I daresay she has suffered. She can't have liked dropping out, sidelong looks — any of the penalties. I daresay she is n't at all a bad woman in her way. But she's light. Women who are really capable of suffering don't leave their children. I have n't any doubt that she imagines her little girl's name is written on her heart. It is n't. I won't say there is n't a heart to write on, for I quite think there is, but there is n't room on that sort of heart for the names of children."

"She's so pretty."

"So, I've no doubt, was Mrs. Potiphar."

"You could see people talking about her, turning their backs —"

"Just so. The penalties I spoke of."

"She looked so lonely when he was n't there."

"I can imagine Boulogne — or Brussels or Bruges — very boring."

There was a silence for a few moments.

"My dear, your pity is wasted upon her. Trimmer's was n't the wrong attitude, even if, as I can quite believe,

the good woman's heart did smite her. Young Hemming is well rid of her — your St. Jemison. He may thank the husband for his venom."

"It's all dreadful," said Anne.

"Not nearly as dreadful (the Lord forgive me — and her!), not nearly as dreadful as it might have been. It was n't only their heels they were cooling while her husband kept them waiting, and luckily (the Lord forgive me again!) she found this out before it was too late."

"He meant to marry her —"

"That's why I say luckily (for which the Lord . . .!) He would have gone through with it cheerfully, whatever the state of his feelings. He's not the sort of man to back out of what the situation demanded. She was a fool not to recognise — well, she's found her vocation. I daresay I'm shocking you, but she is light, light, light. You don't know her as I do."

Anne shook her head.

"I don't know her at all."

"Well, I do — or did, and I even rather liked . . . rather like her. She has her points: kindnesses, generosities, excellent manners. She takes the trouble to make herself agreeable even to old women, and not any the less if their sons should happen to be her lovers. Oh, yes, Stephen in his day. She knew I knew. Bless you, did n't trouble her pretty head, and always was charming to me. That was Cora St. Jemison. Like her? One could n't help liking her. But keep your pity, Anne. Spare yourself the pain of being too sorry for her."

There was a long pause after this. Mrs. Herrick put on her velvet glove and mended the fire.

"And Mr. Hemming?" said Anne then. "Is one to be sorry for him?"

"I think one is to take him as he is. I have my own opinion as to how he came to be in that galley at all. Somebody had to be scapegoat. Somebody always has. He's not a saint. I'm not claiming that for him, or indeed

claiming anything except that, somehow, in spite of appearances, and a good deal more than appearances, too, he's to be trusted."

"I always liked him," said Anne, and remembered that she had said the same thing of good-for-nothing Stephen. She blushed a very rosy red and was glad there was a fire, and very glad that the old lady, who knew most things, at least did not know that time was when John Hemming had wanted to marry her. She stooped for her paper-knife, which had fallen, and went on cutting the pages of "All the Year Round." The sound of the cutting — *cut, cut, cut; cut, cut, cut* — established itself. The rhythmical sound helped the moment. When she looked up her colour was normal.

They talked no more that night of John Hemming or Mrs. St. Jemison. Anne read her magazine — or rather, did not read it, but sat with it in her lap, forgetting to turn over the pages she had cut so assiduously. At half-past ten, Robson and the ventriloquist appeared with their candles.

CHAPTER XVI

ANNE HERRICK, wide awake in the great four-post bed in her room, was grateful to the Waits who sang under the windows of Herrickswood so late that night. Out of the silence suddenly came the singing. She raised her head to listen, at a loss for a moment to account for what she heard. Despite the decorated hall through which she had passed on her way to bed, she had forgotten the season, and old customs connected with it, and she had to collect her thoughts before she could be sure that, wide awake as she knew herself to be, she was not dreaming. Like the strains of an organ in some big and empty church, the voices of men and boys swelled out in the stillness, and from that stillness and the hour borrowed, it may be, a glamour which under any other conditions they might have lacked. There must have been some twelve voices, — the pick, Anne heard afterwards, of a neighbouring choir, — and amongst them three or four of rather more than ordinary quality. She lay still, listening, wishing that Christopher too might hear, but loath to wake him.

> "Ay, and therefore be merry,
> Set sorrow aside;
> Christ Jesus the Saviour
> Was born at this tide."

Glees, ballads, madrigals alternated with hymns. "God rest you merry, gentlemen," was flanked upon the one side by "When I view the Mother holding," and upon the other by "Adeste Fideles." The "Mistletoe Bough" had its place in their repertory.

Nothing else could have calmed Christopher's disturbed mother as did this odd, unlooked-for concert in the night. She grudged the passing of each simple melody as it neared

an end, and feared that every one might be the last. Listening intently she could hear a subdued murmur of voices at the conclusion of each, and could imagine the collecting of the sheets of music, and the discussion which then took place before those of the next were given out. There was the sound of feet; of an occasional laugh under the breath, or perhaps a cough. She heard the quiet opening of a window; little movements in the house itself. Others besides her were listening.

She was not surprised when a gentle knock at the door heralded Trimmer in a flannel dressing-gown.

"Oh, you're not asleep, 'm. I could n't help coming to see. Is n't it beautiful? Is Master Christopher?"

"I did n't like to wake him."

"May I see?"

"If you like."

"He'd never forgive us if we did n't. We're all listening upstairs. They don't always come, — these, — only sometimes. They're special, Ollenshaw says. It's an experience. It would be a pity if he missed it. Nothing like this, 'm, at B'long, is there?"

"Well, tell him he's not to get out of bed. And never mind if you don't quite wake him. Indeed, if you just half-wake him he'll hear through his sleep — perhaps the most wonderful way of all."

So Christopher heard the Waits with the rest, but, being only half-awakened at Trimmer's discretion, heard them as his mother had predicted, in the most wonderful way of all. The voices of celestial choirs mingled with his dreams. Harps, sackbuts, psalteries, dulcimers, and all kinds of music were present ever after in his conception of what Waits were — of what the magic word should and could imply.

"Ay, and therefore be merry,
Set sorrow aside . . ."

So to music passed the night for sleeping Christopher, and so for his mother, who had not thought to sleep, but slept.

Greetings, presents, church, the post-bag — all the usual eager Christmas businesses — filled the morning, but even then, and all through the afternoon, the day seemed to be hurrying towards evening. Anne saw the hours flit by with mixed feelings. She still felt bewildered by the wholesale readjusting of ideas which the talk of the day before with Mrs. Herrick had entailed upon her. Nothing was quite as she had supposed it. She knew not whether to be glad or sorry that circumstances should have made it possible for her to meet her friend of other days once more on open ground. She was of course to have met him anyway, but not as she was now to meet him. How was he different, indeed? He was not different. That could not help still being true. Yet somehow everything was changed.

She went through the day curiously; was out as much as possible, feeling a strange need of air and space. It was happily a day for walking, and she and Christopher did their five or six miles after lunch. They visited the ice in the course of their walk, and found it in excellent condition and considerably thicker than the day before. If the frost lasted she must see about getting skates in the neighbouring town the next day, to be ready for the day after, when all being well, the ice should bear. She talked of this for a little, wondering all the time how best to tell Christopher what he did not know yet. She had thought that he would probably have heard who it was who was coming to dinner, but it was evident that he had not. Trimmer, of course, must have heard. She must have seen the direction, too, on the note which her mistress had given to her, but however much Trimmer might wonder, she was too well-bred a servant to make any comment upon what did not concern her. It would not have been from her that Christopher would have heard.

"Who do you think is coming to dinner?"

"Who?"

She told him.

Mr. Hemming? John Hemming? His John Hemming? Christopher's John Hemming!

Was Mrs. St. Jemison coming too?

But here, from Christopher's point of view, was the difficult thing to understand, for he was not to speak of Mrs. St. Jemison. John Hemming was coming, but Mrs. St. Jemison was still the Mrs. St. Jemison who could n't be called upon or asked anywhere. More than ever now, it seemed, was she outside the pale that Trimmer had spoken about at Boulogne. So much so, that, whatever he did, the one thing he must remember at dinner, and afterwards, and always, was that she must not be mentioned. Difficult, as you will perceive, to understand.

John Hemming, however, was coming. That was the great thing. It blotted out all else. Christopher would see him again, and John Hemming, released, he gathered, in some way from something, would not look aside any more when they met, or look past him, or over him, or otherwise show any disposition to avoid him. Things were different — would be found to be different. It was Christopher then who, like the day itself, strained towards the evening.

Anne Herrick, putting the finishing touches to her dressing, heard the wheels of General Hemming's carriage on the gravel. She had relieved her mind by speaking of these expected guests to Trimmer, and had found, as she expected, that Trimmer knew who was coming. Trimmer knew, too, that Mrs. St. Jemison had taken a further step in her career. Ollenshaw was a mine of information upon the doings of what she called the best people, and had more to tell of Mrs. St. Jemison than Trimmer had to tell her. She had known some nice ones in her time. It was Ollenshaw's sex, Ollenshaw thought, which was most in generally to blame, and Mr. Hemming (who was very good-looking) was probably less culpable than you might think for. Trimmer, reflecting something of all this, and despite

her recent attitude towards the pair at Boulogne, did not seem surprised that Mr. Hemming should be expected. Mrs. St. Jemison, it was evident, stood to her for the ban; the ban removed, there remained Mr. Hemming, with no visible black mark against him. Strange! Yet not very different in essence her own argument, Anne thought; and not so very different Mrs. Herrick's. It was agreeable, however, not to have to explain.

"Your fan, 'm," said Trimmer, "and your gloves," and followed her to the door, to look after her with approbation down the passage. Her mistress was wearing a new dress, and Trimmer thought she had never looked prettier.

Trimmer was not the only one who admired Anne that night.

Anne went of habit to Mrs. Herrick's sitting-room, only to find it empty, and then, guided by the sound of voices, to the drawing-room. Its two fires were blazing and its many candles gave the room a brilliance which became it greatly. Mrs. Herrick was standing at the hearth at the far end of it, talking to an old and a young man. Christopher stood beside her.

"No party, as I warned you," she was saying as Anne came in. "Just family. You remember my daughter-in-law."

Anne, reaching the party, shook hands with General Hemming. She turned then to the other, of whose exact aspect, though she had not looked at him till she stood beside him, she had been conscious as she crossed the room. She put out her hand. She heard herself greet him without knowing what she said, and at the same moment dinner was announced.

"I ought to have beaten up a little girl for Christopher, ought n't I?" said Christopher's grandmother, apportioning his mother to John Hemming with a wave of her fan; "but little girls are not easy to get at Christmas — nor any one else, for that matter, which makes me the more grateful to you all for coming to eat your Christmas dinner

with a lonely old woman. Will you go on, Mr. Hemming? Christopher, don't tread on my tail, nor laugh at your grandmother's back."

Christopher, who had no thought of doing either, laughed happily in her face. He was n't a bit afraid of her now.

Anne hoped, prayed, that the hand on John Hemming's arm did not tremble. She had an idea that the arm on which it rested was itself not quite steady. Would he ignore Boulogne and their recent meeting? Should she? It was partly of nervousness, partly to settle her nerves, that she spoke of the place herself.

She saw at once that he was not going to ignore anything. He accepted their common knowledge as something that had to be granted. There was unhappiness behind him, she perceived, but perceived also that he was not unhappy. In appearance, as she saw him closely, he was hardly changed from her lover of years ago.

But what she chiefly noticed, and what told her more of him than he or his looks could tell, was somehow his father's aspect that evening. She could guess that their relations as father and son were of the sort in which not much would be said. She could believe that possibly neither remonstrance nor protest had passed the old man's lips during the time which was now over. But the impression which she got now was of one from whose heart there was rising a song of thanksgiving — a pæan of which the theme was "This my Son," and the burden, "Which was dead and is alive again."

It was the season, perhaps, the carols of the night, the words which she had heard with her outward ears in church that morning. She did not think it.

Dinner meanwhile was passing cheerfully. The presence of Christopher kept the spirit of the occasion alive even for his elders, who else, perhaps, for their several reasons, would have been inclined rather to forget than to foster it. Under the influence of it Anne felt her nervousness evaporating.

"He is none the worse of his accident?" John Hemming said.

"No," she answered. "You cured him."

His smile leapt to hers.

"I don't know how I did that."

"Nor I," she said, shaking her head.

They spoke under cover of a friendly argument upon some local question on which Mrs. Herrick was engaged with General Hemming.

"He cherishes the nail," she added.

How strange it was, she was thinking again, how strange! This man might have been her husband. Would there have been Mrs. St. Jemison then? But would there have been Christopher?

She fell into silence for a few moments, but for long enough to send a thought on its familiar way to India. So well did her thoughts know their way there; to a bungalow which she had once called "home"; and a little graveyard in the hills!

"Can you skate?" she heard Christopher saying. "The ice'll bear to-morrow, I believe, but it'll be safe the day after, and we're going to. At least, I'm going to learn. Mother can."

Christopher's John Hemming skated.

"Come and skate here, then," said Christopher's grandmother. "Not that any invitation is necessary, for every one knows the lake is always open when there's a frost. Come to lunch."

"Oh, do," cried Christopher, excited in a moment, — "do. Make him come, mother."

Christopher, all unconsciously, had made it possible for him to look at Christopher's mother before he answered. It was the note of the night before again. She could not but be pleased.

She met his look, but did not speak, and he accepted the invitation.

"I'm on your side now about the frost," he said to

Christopher. "We must make it last somehow, must n't we?"

"It's going to," said Christopher. "Robson says so. He knows by his bones."

"Sing to us, Anne," Mrs. Herrick said later.

Christopher had gone to bed, by then, but he was too excited to be asleep, and from the distant drawing-room the music stole to him presently as he lay awake listening. He was awake an hour later when the carriage bearing the departing guests rolled off, crunching the gravel. He heard the trot of the horses' hoofs halfway across the park to where the road turned and a little hill interposed between it and the house.

"What shall I sing?" said Anne, and went over to the piano.

John Hemming followed her to light the candles, and stayed near when he had done so. She played a few chords at random and drifted on a train of thought into the opening bars of Adolphe Adam's "Cantique de Noël," which that night she knew would be sung at the Cathedral at Boulogne. It was not wholly its appropriateness to the day that made her choose it — not so much that, indeed, as the thought that Granny Oxeter would perhaps be listening to it up in the old town, and that she was conscious of a sudden wish to be in touch with one who understood so well.

Minuit, Chrétiens, c'est l'heure solennelle
Où l'homme Dieu descendit jusqu' à nous,
Pour effacer la tache originelle,
Et de son père arrêter le courroux.
Le monde entier tressaille d'espérance
A cette nuit qui lui donne un sauveur.
Peuple à genoux, attends ta délivrance;
Noël, Noël, voici le Rédempteur!

As impossible, even without Christopher, to get away from the spirit of the festival as to get away from Boulogne!

Need she strive to get away from either? John Hemming, sitting near the piano, and with his eyes on her face as she sang, did not look to her troubled (any more than, to Christopher, he had looked "entangled" or "wretched"); and Anne herself could not deny that upon this Christmas night she at any rate was quietly happy.

She sang one or two more songs after that: "The Bridge," by Miss Lindsay, which was still in every amateur's repertory then; and, with a vague notion that Christopher upstairs might be listening to her, his favourite "Ballad of Lord Lovel and the Lady Ancebel."

"Lord Lovel" was a favourite with General Hemming, too, it seemed. He rose from his chair by the fire and came over to the piano. He stood by his son. He did not look at him, but his look, as Anne knew, held him for all that. Again she became conscious of that inner song. She could not mistake it. It was audible to her as her own singing. She had to steady her own voice as she listened.

> "They grew till they grew to the top of the church,
> And when they could grow no higher,
> They grew into a true lover's knot,
> And so were joined together."

As clear as this: Which was lost and is found. Which was dead and is alive again.

But was he alive again? She looked at the unblemished face. Had he been dead? Death even in life must leave its mark. Death had not marked him. He was as the three who had come up out of the furnace unscathed. Not so much as the smell of fire had passed over him. Was he then any more alive again than he had been dead?

She put the thought from her.

CHAPTER XVII

CHRISTOPHER, sure enough, had heard "Lord Lovel and Lady Ancebel," and was still awake when his mother went up to bed. Trimmer had been called in that he might hear what she had to tell of festivities below the salt. Yes, they had naturally had turkey, too, — and, for those who liked them, oysters first, for that matter, just like the dining-room, — and of course everything else. Crackers with mottoes. Trimmer had kept her caps for him. He should have them in the morning. But he should have seen Ollenshaw in hers! Ollenshaw in a cocked hat with a bunch of paper feathers. Ollenshaw in a Scotch bonnet with a paper thistle on one side and two little paper ribbons behind! Mr. Robson, too. He had worn an old lady's hood with paper ruchings, and did look a droll.

"Christopher, Christopher, why are n't you asleep? Trimmer, are you keeping him awake? Tell him he's to go to sleep this instant."

But she had to go into his room, all the same. Did n't she hope? . . . Yes, on the whole, though she was not sure that she liked the cold, and his grandmother was sure that *she* did n't.

Was n't she glad Mr. Hemming . . . ?

Selfishly, if Mr. Hemming instead of Christopher's mother would hold Christopher up while he floundered. Now, go to sleep. But one more thing, and one more, and in one minute, and so on.

"I knew it was nonsense about not being able to know him," said Christopher.

She left it at that — and him also. In time, it is to be supposed, he went to sleep.

The frost held. A few intrepid or foolhardy spirits ven-

tured upon the ice at their own risk the next day, and a youth got a ducking for his pains. All was as it should be. He could be held up as an awful example to Christopher, who could thus, with a reasonableness which was demonstrable, be kept off till the safer morrow. Skates — Boxing-Day though it was — were secured that afternoon in the neighbouring town, where every ironmonger's shop, howsoever closed, could yet be seen to have broken out into skates. The word was gummed to window panes; the things themselves could be seen hanging in clusters within. A surreptitious business was done at a side door. It was enough, Christopher's grandmother said, to set the frost by the heels without further ado.

The frost was not to be frightened. The thermometer fell steadily. A clear keen night gave place to a clear keen day, and after breakfast there might have been seen crossing the park a little cavalcade consisting of Anne Herrick, Christopher, and Trimmer, followed discreetly by wooden Albert, the ventriloquist, with a folding-chair, a bunch of skates, and a gimlet.

Ten o'clock struck from the clock over the stables as they reached the lake. Early as they were, John Hemming was there before them. Christopher saw him at once. Anne saw him. He skated up as they approached.

For Christopher, who had only slidden on ice heretofore, a whole set of impressions. These began with the putting-on of the skates. He watched with fascination the boring, by Albert, of the holes in the heels of his boots. It was like having an operation performed upon you yourself — only that it did not hurt. It felt as if the gimlet was being screwed into you, only that you did n't feel more than an insinuating pressure. Presently surely the point must come through. But it did n't. Horses must feel something like this, he thought, when they were being shod. Then the screwing, the whole skate being twisted in Albert's competent red hand; the feeling of tension as the screw bit.

After that, tight strapping. Discomfort enough for unaccustomed feet.

Then the hobbling walk to the ice; the ice itself; the pride that went before a fall; the acceptance of rejected aid — from his mother, from John Hemming, from Trimmer, from wooden Albert. We leave him to his first floundering.

It wanted but the feel under her feet of the blades cutting into the elastic ice, as she swung out on to the lake, to tell Anne once for all that, if much seemed to have happened to her, and, thus, many years to have passed over her head, she was not so very much older than the eager Christopher himself. Skating in that ladylike age was one of the few sports open to women. It was Anne's one accomplishment. Like a good swimmer she struck out confidently, sure, in spite of the lapse of time since last she had skated, that she could skate. The outside edge was the limit as yet of her modest attainment; but what else she could do she did well, and what she had been able to do she could do now. Her spirits rose. People were arriving. A carriage or two drove up to the bank of the lake and in effect emptied itself on to the ice. The whir of the skating rang on the pleasant air. Sunshine gilded the day.

Anne recognised a few people. Here were neighbours of her mother-in-law's who had called upon her when she had stayed at Herrickswood as a bride. Some of them recognised her. The usual civilities were exchanged. Christopher had to be shown to one or two of these. They reminded him of the people to whom he used to be bidden to give his right hand — visitors, in short, which is just what, so far as he was concerned, they were. He got back as soon as might be to his floundering. Hemming took him in hand from time to time — bidding him put his feet together, towed him gently, or, holding him under the arms, pushed him in front of him. Christopher at such moments was in the seventh heaven of delight. His laughter rang

out. Anne, looking at the big man and the little boy, felt again the tightening at her heart which she had felt when she stood at the foot of Christopher's bed months ago at Boulogne.

"He'll skate in no time," Hemming said, bringing the boy back to her after one such round.

"I nearly knocked him down," said Christopher gleefully.

"Don't let him tease you," said Christopher's mother.

John Hemming delivered Christopher to his floundering and Trimmer.

"Mr. Hemming says I'm better every time. Where's Albert?"

Albert had gone back to the house.

"Oh, well, then you'll do," said Christopher.

"Do, indeed!" said Trimmer good-humouredly. "There, give me your hand, sir."

John Hemming went back to Christopher's mother.

"Will you skate with me?"

He had not asked her to skate with him, though he had skated beside her.

"Yes, John, of course."

They swung out together.

Impossible to withstand the pleasure of this exercise! Anne felt her cheeks flush and her eyes sparkle, as she gave herself up to it. She was a girl again, skating at Cheltenham and known as the Pretty Miss Oxeter — some one Christopher had never known or dreamed of; the crinolined "Belle" of a certain Bachelors' Ball; the coveted partner of a season's very amateurish croquet. "Long, long ago," as the song said? Not a bit of it! Not any time at all, measured by her feelings that day. Christopher was some younger brother, and she as always the youngest Miss Oxeter. She sent a thought over the water to Laura and Catherine, whose pet she had been before she married, half wishing they could see her; and to her mother, wholly wishing that she could.

Then she remembered that Laura and Catherine would be shocked. Not at her skating, — though even that might surprise them, — but at her company. That brought her up with a jerk.

There were more people now. Mrs. Herrick came down in her pony-chair at noon, and looked on for a time and asked a few of her more intimate friends up to lunch. She wore the inevitable sealskin of prosperity or average prosperity, and a bonnet on which there were bugles, which jingled as she moved her head in talking. A groom, who walked beside the chair when he drove the fat pony, stood to attention as his mistress held her court.

Every one came up to speak to the old woman, but she had her favourites, it was plain. Anne, like Christopher, no longer afraid of her, could yet see why she had been. She remembered how she had agreed with Christopher that his other grandmother was "most" his grandmother, and was glad now to think that she had recanted almost as soon as the words were spoken.

"If the frost lasts, I think you'll have to give me a few more days," Mrs. Herrick said, smiling as she watched Christopher's scuttling. He was getting past the first stages. "It's Sunday again to-morrow, remember, in this week of Sundays, and it's plain that boy wants to skate."

They were to have left on Monday. The rooms in Ebury Street were engaged indeed from then.

"You tempt me," Anne said.

"Stay, dear, as long as you will — as long as you can. It's a great pleasure to me to have Kit's boy with me, and Kit's boy's mother. There, think it over. I'm going on for my drive."

The groom took the reins and his place beside the chair, and Mrs. Herrick was drawn from the scene. There was rime on the grass, and the equipage, dark against the white, and clear-cut as a silhouette, could be seen making its slow round of the park as its occupant looked at her trees or her

roads, her fences or her gates. Woe betide the perfunctory or the careless workman on the Herrickswood estate.

Trimmer, enjoying herself quietly amid the general bustle, thought suddenly what a Pair her mistress and Mr. Hemming made when they skated together. The thought came suddenly, but what led to it was probably gradual enough. The mere sight of them with crossed hands sweeping rhythmically across the ice would not have given her the feeling of one who makes a discovery, or who sees what others may be looking at, but do not see. The two were not, indeed, skating together at the moment when Trimmer received her impression. On the contrary, her mistress was standing at the edge of the ice talking to one of the ladies who had gathered round Mrs. Herrick's pony-chair; and Mr. Hemming was tracing wonderful and beautiful figures with a stumpy little person, though an accomplished skater, whom Albert had pointed out to her as one of the big-wigs of the neighbourhood. The unavoidable contrast presented by these two, his tall shapeliness and the big-wig's sturdy squatness, may have had its share in throwing Trimmer's thoughts back to the last combination of which one of them had been part. Such a look-back must of necessity have shown congruity for ill-assortment, and thus have appeared to point out, to lay stress upon, what was, after all, for all the world to see. But, at the back of the mind of Trimmer making her trite observation, lay who knows what of other, but unregistered, impressions, preparing her for what she had none the less supposed herself unprepared to see? A Pair. Why, what a Pair!

Trimmer leant upon the handle of the broom which she had been plying betweentimes to make herself useful and keep herself warm. Christopher wanted less and less help as the morning went on. He had ceased to shuffle and walk upon his skates, and was beginning to feel his legs. He would strike out and make headway till a fall brought him

back to starting-point. Trimmer, leaning on her broom, watched him absently.

A Pair, in truth, — though such a thought might never have entered, might never enter, the head of either of them. They seemed picked out from the rest, for all that, if in reality they were not. There were many better skaters on the ice than Trimmer's mistress, one or two as good as Mr. Hemming. Yet somehow you found yourself putting them together, did n't you? They looked best, it was certain, together. With no one else, that is, did either "match" as with the other. Was it the lady's-maid in Trimmer finding her out? What a Pair they made — words surely to be spoken from over a sewing-machine; at the wardrobe door, the arms full of skirts; across a dressing-table, the head craned towards a window! Lady's-maidery, Trimmer knew it. The thought, however, insisted upon expression, and expression upon this phrase and no other. Such a Pair!

"You looked so nice, 'm, skating," she permitted herself that night, as she was putting her mistress to bed.

"Did I, Trimmer? I'm very glad you thought so."

"I'm sure every one thought so. Indeed, I heard the remark passed more than once. There must be some satisfaction in doing a thing which — when you do it gracefully, of course — makes you look so much better than anybody else."

Christopher's mother smiled. She knew her limitations, and that she would never be anything more than an averagely good skater. She was not of the stuff that those who really excel are made of. Christopher might be. He had not been wrong when he said that in good time he would beat her.

"Ah, you're prejudiced, my good Trimmer. I'm not bad, considering how little opportunity I've had of practising. But I should never go far —"

"Oh, distance," said Trimmer contemptuously. "It's gracefulness I'm talking about — all that matters for a lady."

"Well, I did n't mean distance. I can't progress. Now *he*," she nodded in the direction of Christopher's room, "really did make some progress to-day. Mrs. Herrick has asked us to stay on if the frost lasts —"

"I hope it will, 'm," said Trimmer.

It was accepting the imaginary situation.

CHAPTER XVIII

WAS it imaginary? Trimmer of course really thought so, though she might Pair the suitable to infinity. She even took herself to task for presuming to think at all. Anne Herrick did think so, told herself so, insisted. It was, because it must be. *She* naturally took herself to task, or rather continued to do so. The frost lasted. She saw him every day, skated with him, talked to him; got away from Herrickswood safely.

Safely? There was something, then? — some sort of a situation? Certainly not. Every one in the world might have heard what they said to each other on the ice or elsewhere. Certainly there was no situation. But she drew a long breath in the train, and many in the lodgings in Ebury Street.

She was very sorry to leave Herrickswood. She had not altogether looked forward to her visit, but had, as she found, greatly enjoyed it. Wholly new relations seemed to have established themselves between her and her mother-in-law. It was as if, somehow by reason of Christopher, each had seen the other in a new light. The more she thought of her visit — reviewed it in detail — the more she knew that she had enjoyed it. It had been a time of quiet well-being with an undercurrent of excitement. (The excitement remained.) A thought of Herrickswood gave her not the severe hall, its severity modified by evergreens and red berries, not the candle-lit drawing-room of state, not even her own room with the great four-post bed, not the old oak or the tapestries, but a little intimate room in which an old lady with a black velvet glove mended rather than tended a blazing fire. Some such picture would always henceforth present Herrickswood to her.

She drew her breath all the same. The undercurrent of excitement had not made itself felt for nothing. Herrickswood stood for danger as once Boulogne for disturbance.

Another rattling four-wheeler with straw in the bottom of it took the travellers to Ebury Street. Another just such meal as before regaled them upon their arrival. To the same sounds did Christopher fall asleep. Even the dripping in the cistern at the top of the stairs was still to be heard. After the silence of the country the wonderful noises sounded a little louder, but that was all the difference; and the same sense of being in the very, very heart of things held him.

Christopher, with a sovereign in his pocket and the world before him, did not employ time present in vainly regretting time past. He had enjoyed every minute of Herrickswood, and now was enjoying every minute of London. All was fish that came to his net. For Robson and his efficient wooden satellites, for Mrs. Wellington of the housekeeper's room, for Ollenshaw and all the rest of the orderly staff of well-trained servants, there were a landlord in rusty black, a landlady with a perpetual smile and a chenille net, and the usual Mary-Ann of all lodging-houses of that day. These persons, however, jointly and severally succeeded in interesting the ever-interested Christopher.

If Boulogne had seemed wonderful, what of London? Surely all the people in the world must be there together. Some of the streets ran people as rivers run water. Not all. Ebury Street was never crowded, nor were the adjacent streets with the great squares in between, Eaton Square where "grand" people lived (and his Grandmother Herrick used to have a house), and Belgrave Square where grander. Nor was Grosvenor Place crowded, though it could be, his mother said, when on a certain day in the spring the balconies were filled with gentlemen and ladies to watch other people coming back from the Derby. But

Oxford Street and Regent Street and a street called the Strand! — and another street called Fleet Street, through which Christopher passed when he went to St. Paul's! In those the people were numberless — like the sands of the sea or the hairs of your head, as it said in the Bible. Christopher gasped for sheer amazement and delight. This was the London of his wildest dreams. Not the least part of its fascination was an unacknowledged fear of it. Things happened in London — murders, mysterious disappearances. Children were stolen for their clothes, "enticed" down courts and alleys, dragged away, pulled in, perhaps, through such doorways as he himself passed when he was out, and nothing more was ever heard of them. Some one called "Mrs. Tomson" (though how he had heard of her!) had lately been hanged for wholesale child-murder. She buried the little bodies of her victims in quicklime, and was altogether a creature of horror to haunt the young imagination. He looked for Mrs. Tomsons on his walks. Many harmless black-clad women were Mrs. Tomsons, he was sure. Then there were Pickpockets whom you were to Beware of, with every other sort of rogue and knave. You might be rubbing shoulders with Pickpockets without knowing it. They were trained, according to his mother (or so he understood), by an old Jew called Fagin, of whom he was to read one day in something called "Oliver Twist." Christopher suspected a Fagin in every shabby old man who had a hooked nose, and a Pickpocket in every gutter-snipe. Perhaps pockets really were oftener rifled in the seventies. Trimmer, at any rate, had the distinction of having hers picked upon this very visit — to the tune, happily, of no more than a few pence, however, since of her forethought she was carrying the bulk of her wealth in her glove. Christopher *knew* the thief was one of two (probably innocent) persons between whom she had sat in an omnibus, because one had a patch over his eye and the other a hole in his elbow.

Trimmer could only ejaculate, "How lucky I'd emptied

my purse!" — adding from time to time that if they'd only known it, she had been carrying half a sovereign in gold at that very moment.

"But there," she said, "I never heard of any one picking a glove."

Christopher and his mother agreed with her that the thing was as good as a lesson.

So London answered every expectation. Christopher would indeed have something to tell the stay-at-home aunts when he got back to Boulogne. He had visited the capital of England to good purpose. It had not denied him.

The day after the picked pocket, Trimmer started for Birmingham, where, as it had been arranged, she was to spend a few days with her parents, and Christopher and his mother pursued their sight-seeing alone. Every morning after breakfast they would start out on their excursions. Sometimes they would lunch out, choosing a pastry-cook's shop for their modest repast, and, in holiday mood, eating with impunity many things ordinarily called unwholesome. Madame Tussaud's Exhibition was visited, and there, in a room known as the Chamber of Horrors and costing an extra sixpence to enter, Christopher saw an effigy of Mrs. Tomson herself — lately added! He thrilled, but was vaguely disappointed. He had pictured her this, you see, and she was notably that. He saw a respectable little woman in a brown dress, with nothing sinister about her but her very white face. She did not alarm him except when he met her in dreams.

The Zoölogical Gardens were visited — and, lo! they were the Bird-Shop on the Port in apotheosis! For the dogs in the cages, there were lions; for the cats, tigers; for the birds, such winged things, some of them, as he had never imagined. But all were friends of his already. He went an ecstatic way from cage to cage, from house to house. Perhaps the greatest excitement lay in wondering whither each path in the gardens led, what each fresh house as it discovered itself amongst the trees would be found to hold. On

a path near the parrot-house he ran up against one of his school-fellows, and that too was a great adventure. Oh, London, which could yield such adventures, was wonderful!

London was all-capable, and was to yield him others.

He saw Mrs. St. Jemison one day. He was sure of it. That was the day he went to the Polytechnic where the diving-bell was. She was driving with a gentleman in a victoria. She looked different, somehow, from Mr. Hemming's Mrs. St. Jemison. But that it had been she who flashed past behind two high-stepping horses he was quite, quite sure.

"Fancy, if she'd known that we'd just seen Mr. Hemming," he said. "She'd have —" He looked at his mother and broke off in what more he had been about to say.

"I thought I told you, Christopher —"

"Yes, but not in London."

"Well, in London, too."

She had seen, and, if she was not mistaken, Mrs. St. Jemison had seen also, and had recognised. Anne wished this had not happened.

And she asked herself why. But somehow wished . . .

To Christopher it was part of the wonderfulness of London — where everything was wonderful. Nowhere else, he was sure, would you come across people in this way. Perhaps they would even see Mr. Hemming. This he ventured to say aloud. His mother had to collect her thoughts before she said that she thought That was very Unlikely.

"So was Mrs. — well, so was Eddy Mason!" He named the schoolboy they had met in Regent's Park.

"So was he what?"

"Unlikely," said Christopher.

"We'll go and have tea," said his mother.

Every second shop then was not a tea-shop. It took them some minutes to find one.

But Christopher was to be proved more correct than she. Might she not have told herself that it was generally the

Unlikely that did happen? — more, that it was for their very unlikeliness that the things which happened did happen? Whom should they meet the next day but John Hemming? Whom else?

They came upon him face to face at Hyde Park Corner.

"I wondered," he said, "whether I should meet you anywhere."

He did not say that he had spent the last few days looking for them. A log of his peregrinations would have recorded an erratic course. He had been to Madame Tussaud's even.

"I said we should meet you — at least, I said we might," said Christopher breathlessly. "But mother did n't think it was likely."

"Christopher met a school friend," Anne hastened to say, "and argued by analogy. If he made one unexpected encounter — you see?"

"I see," said John Hemming. "And there was something in your argument after all, was n't there, little chap?"

"Things happen for Christopher," Anne said, smiling. She was beginning to think so.

"We're going to the Christy Minstrels," said Christopher, still breathlessly. "Could n't you come, too? Could n't he, mummy?"

"Christopher, don't bother people. Mr. Hemming does n't want to go to Christy Minstrels. They are n't the sort of thing —"

"Are n't they?" said John Hemming, looking at her. "Does n't he?"

"He does," said Christopher. "I know he does, mother."

Anne looked from one to the other.

"In the daytime? On a fine afternoon like this? Christopher and I are country cousins — or exiles home again."

"May n't I be an exile? Home again, too?"

He did not mean it, or, anyway, quite mean it. But Anne in a moment saw his father and heard again the silent song of thanksgiving.

"If it really would n't bore you."

His answer was to smile at Christopher and to call a cab. They all got in and he gave the direction.

After the Christy Minstrels, it was the Tower; after the Tower, the Pantomime at Drury Lane; after the Pantomime, Westminster Abbey and the Houses of Parliament. John Hemming went with them to all these. How this came about Anne hardly knew. It seemed to be Christopher who was responsible.

So slipped the days away. They hurried towards — Anne knew not what! But that they hurried towards something, she knew only too well. Two thirds of the visit were over. She began to look to Boulogne as she had once looked to London. It was Boulogne now that stood for safety.

Christopher, living to a running accompaniment of pantomime tunes, of the tunes of the Moore and Burgess Minstrels, with imported airs from Offenbach behind all, saw nothing of what was under his eyes. There was nothing to see, in a sense, and certainly nothing to hear. It was only his mother who knew and whose heart beat the faster. He, if he thought at all, thought that John Hemming was there because he, Christopher, was. In the supreme egoism of youth, he had not come yet to realise any existence entirely independent of his own.

"You're coming to-morrow, are n't you?" he said every day, and Anne sometimes checked him, and sometimes did not. It seemed useless to protest. As she looked to Boulogne, so she looked now to the return of Trimmer, whose absence seemed in a manner to leave her without shelter. Not that she wanted shelter exactly, or wanted anything. She was enjoying the dangers of London as she had enjoyed the dangers of Herrickswood. Her life was fuller for this new element that had come into it. But . . . It was Trimmer's own But of an earlier occasion.

Trimmer wrote from Birmingham. She too had been to a Pantomime, and had wished for Master Christopher.

She wished particularly that he could have seen Cinderella's Ugly Sisters, who *would* have made him laugh. Trimmer's mother had got quite a stitch in her side, and Trimmer's brother's little girl a hiccough. But both had admitted that the game was worth the candle. Trimmer had been to a party at her cousin's and had played games. Her cousin had worn an evening dress, which Trimmer thought was giving herself great airs, and which was quite out of place — besides being in very doubtful taste. The party itself, however, had been very agreeable. She was enjoying her holiday, but was counting the days till she should get back, all the same.

"You can't think how I miss Master Christopher," was her postscript for her mistress's private eye. "And I can't bear to think, madam, of your having to do your own hair, I can't, indeed."

"Dear Trimmer," Christopher's mother said to herself as she read.

In the end the good creature came back a day before her holiday was up. Her nostalgia — a homesickness, at home, for the home of her adoption — would not allow her to stay her time out.

Anne Herrick kissed her upon her arrival — a sight which gave Christopher a curious feeling of surprise mixed with pleasure. He took Trimmer for granted himself, but though he on his part only greeted her with "Hulloa!" and barely submitted to her embrace, he was genuinely attached to her.

Tears had sprung to Trimmer's eyes at her mistress's kiss.

"'Olidays are all very well, 'm, and I'm sure I've enjoyed myself tremendously, but there's nothing like getting back, 'm, is there?"

Her mistress rallied her.

"What will you do when he goes to school?"

Trimmer shook her head.

"He need n't think it's him only," she said. "It is n't

— though once you've been a nurse . . . Well, there! And to think I shall be brushing your hair again, 'm, this very evening."

Yes, Trimmer was one of the Family — no doubt about that. Christopher sat up a little later to hear all her news. She came back from Birmingham full of adventures. She had had a proposal amongst others. At the party she had met the gentleman who paid her this attention. Like the piano-tuner, he was in a superior position — a clurk, in fact, in the Post Office.

"What did you say to him?" asked Christopher.

"That I knew when I was well off, my precious."

"What did he say?"

"Asked me to think it over."

"And will you?"

"I said I could do that while he waited."

"Shall you tell the piano-tuner?"

"Better not," said Trimmer. "Better keep some one in reserve, I think, against I want him."

So Trimmer talked. She listened, too, and heard all the London doings. She heard of Mr. Hemming's presence without showing surprise — which may have shown that there was surprise to be felt.

"In London," she said. "Fancy that, now." No more.

Shelter? How? Anne could not have told. Yet with Trimmer back, assuredly she felt more secure. There was only a week left now, and then she would be in sanctuary. She thought of her snug drawing-room in the green shuttered house, the lamp, the "Cornhill Magazine" from Meridew's: an attractive picture. Even if you were young, it would be possible to grow old gently, books helping — work, and the faithful Trimmer somewhere at hand. She saw herself and Trimmer growing old together. By degrees, perhaps, as the sending for her from the workroom became more frequent, Trimmer would change insensibly from a maid to a companion. Christopher would be out in the

world, of course, though in what capacity she did not know, and letters would come from him, some of which she would read to Trimmer, some, keep to herself. They would talk of him, she and Trimmer, and of their wonderful memories of his childhood. And so — disturbing things put away — they would grow old.

And then the sight of a tall figure coming down the street, or the sound of a voice, or the touch of a hand, would show her quite a different picture, in which growing old would be put off indefinitely. In this picture, life would be seen as a vigorous strenuous force carrying all before it, an onward, perhaps an upward, movement; or as a business in itself, absorbing, compelling, not a mere acquiescent drifting with wind or tide. In this picture Trimmer did not let her whole youth slip by, but married her piano-tuner, or her clurk, or another!

There were presently but three more days; but two; there was only to-morrow. Then it was found that Christopher, who had been almost everywhere else, had not been to the Crystal Palace. He could hardly have crammed more into his holidays. But the Crystal Palace — to have risked missing that! There was happily still time. The Crystal Palace, it was decided, should crown the visit.

CHAPTER XIX

THE Crystal Palace for Christopher began at Victoria — at the Booking-Office, where, wonderfully, you asked for Return Tickets with Admission, and heard something about High and Low Levels. The journey in the crowded train, thereafter, was part of the day's pleasure. One mitigation of all pleasure there was, and this lay in the fact that Mr. Hemming had not known of the proposed jaunt, and that his (Christopher's) mother for some reason would not write to volunteer plans that chanced to have been settled after Mr. Hemming's departure on the preceding day. He had spent the morning with them at the National Gallery, and it was not till the afternoon that this excursion was mooted. He would be disappointed, Christopher was sure, and had been inclined to argue; but his mother would not write.

Inwardly she was herself somewhat exercised. She knew, though nothing had been said about the morrow, that Hemming would be expecting to see them as usual. For the very reason that nothing had been said, she knew it, and, also, that he would in truth, as Christopher argued, be disappointed. Yet the evening had passed and she could not bring herself to write. How could she write? It would be like suggesting that he should come, too. Impossible! In her heart of hearts, moreover, she was afraid of this last day. In the end, in case he should call, she left a message for him with the chenille-netted landlady, and made it as disarming as might be. It was the most (and the least) she could do, but it did not set her mind at rest.

The train bore them onward. They reached the station. They alighted.

What was it that Christopher had expected? Crystal

columns, translucent as barley sugar, cut glass pillars, thick transparent walls? Beams, masonry, floors, staircases, all of clearest glass? The New Jerusalem in fine old paste? The Heavenly City fashioned of a single diamond? A palace of carved ice? Something of all these. His first impression was one of stupendous disappointment. This, the Crystal Palace! It was only a large greenhouse. Crystal! There were panes like these in the greenhouses at Herrickswood. He looked up at the vaulted roof with a feeling of personal injury.

The sloping approach up the long covered way from the station had been well enough. It had whetted curiosity. Every moment he had expected the vision to break upon him in its glory. At any bend he had thought to see the crystal portico . . .

A greenhouse!

He grew red. He was too old to burst into tears. But a conservatory, a greenhouse! . . .

"Don't you like it?"

His mother and Trimmer, both uncomprehending, saw.

He would not explain, and wandered about gloomily for a while. They exchanged glances over his head. He walked beside them, or just behind them — not ahead. His mother, pursuing a train of thought of her own (which in point of fact pursued her!), believed him to be regretting the absence of John Hemming. Trimmer fancied that the excitement of the past few weeks was finding him out — beginning to tell upon him. But in reality he was like people at some play, the title or description of which has misled or mystified them. The spirit of the place had not revealed itself to him. He was outside its intimacy; kept outside by barriers of his own unconscious building. It was quite suddenly that the barriers, like the walls of Jericho at the sound of the trumpet, fell.

Did a trumpet sound? Not exactly. For it was nothing more than a piano somewhere near at hand, which, breaking into one of the rattling tunes of the recent pantomime and

of the London streets, started him forward on eager legs in its metallic direction. He was "ahead" in a moment. No more acquiescent goose-step, no more lagging! The piano was at a music-stall. A piece of music lay open on the folding "rest," and reading from it a haughty young lady with mittened fingers sat playing the song of the moment. A little crowd listened. She wet her first finger at her lip when she turned over the page. She left the song unfinished. But Christopher had been admitted to the free-masonry of the place. Almost at once he became aware of a very network of sounds enclosed under the glass roof. In the mesh you might distinguish the popping of a pop-gun exploited for the tempting of some child at some stall, the boom and whir of a humming-top, the tinkle of many musical boxes, with the sound of other pianos in distant places. There was a buzzing and a rattle of talk, from which stood out, "This Way for the Performing Fleas," or the "Wonders of the Microscope," or "Smith's Panorama of the Holy Land," of the side-showmen. There was a reminiscence for Christopher of the noises of the fair at Boulogne. "Take your seats for the Marvellous Grotto Family, the World's Champion Slack-Line Performers." At Boulogne there had been a Champion of the Slack Wire with the curious name of Milly Ethel, who in addition to wire-walking claimed to be magnetic, and the showman's cry to the banging of the big drum had been "Entrez, Messieurs, Dames! Allons voir ce phénomène artistique au salon de Mees Millee Etelle! Va commencer. Prenez vos places." Not so much difference in the cries. The fair under a roof. Other sounds came from the refreshment places, whence proceeded a continual clatter of plates, knives and forks, cups and saucers, with occasional shivering of glasses on a tray. The sound of teaspoons rattling into saucers was as recurrent as that of the drawing of corks. Through all, over all, under all, like the sound of the sea behind other sounds, was heard the tramp or shuffle of feet on the boards. That which he received then was

as good as that which he relinquished! It was one sort of palace for another, that was all! Later from the grounds he was to see that in sunlight it was not called "Crystal" wholly for nothing, but he had accepted it now as it was, and in turn been accepted of it. Like London, the Crystal Palace, recognising her own, did not deny him.

His mother and Trimmer saw the remarkable change in him, and in their turn did some accepting, without, however, understanding. Once infected with the zeal of the house, he wanted to see everything — from the Pompeiian Courts to the Courts of the Performing Fleas. He gathered and imparted information. Pompeii, he told Trimmer, had been destroyed by Vesuvius, and the Performing Fleas fed on the Man's Arm.

"Disgusting!" said Trimmer.

The morning was spent in seeing a variety of sights and in running up against the great clock, the Roman letters on which were so many feet high for his wonder, and the hands so many feet long. In their perambulations the three were always coming upon it. Christopher's mother did not know whether it was as big as or bigger than the clock at Westminster. It was a landmark anyway, a good place to meet at, if people got separated from the rest of the party. Under the Clock, it seemed, was a phrase in very constant use in the building.

The event of the day was of course the pantomime. Towards that the whole of the forenoon set, as sunflowers turn to the sun. There was lunch to be eaten in the mean time, however, and they now began to search for a restaurant which should satisfy their modest requirements. They wanted a sort of tea for luncheon — which was, indeed, what most other people were having.

The choice made, an English waiter took their orders; Anne at the last moment changing her mind in favour of coffee, in the interests of the next meal, at which tea would be essential, and Christopher his — if he can be said to have changed it! — in favour of ginger beer. Trimmer kept

to tea. There was nothing like tea, she said, to pick you up when you were tired. The order given, it was they who waited. It was not ungrateful, however, to sit still after so much walking. They watched laden trays going to other tables, and only from time to time attempted to expedite matters with a gentle protest. A confidential nod from the distance, or a "Coming, lady, coming," or a "Yours next, 'm, without fail," was all that such patient exhortation brought forth for a period, but at last came the tray. The waiter apportioned the blame to the "buffit." He unloaded, dealing plates like cards, and about as rapidly as if delft had indeed been pasteboard. He had given his order, — so and so, and so and so, one coffee, one tea, one ginger, — they might have heard him. It was the "buffit." He was for ever hurrying them up over there. Here we were, however, and he might venture to say, asking pardon for the presumption, that the ginger beer was for the young gentleman. So he disarmed them. They fell to.

They were very hungry. Trimmer had threatenings of a headache which happily the tea dispelled. Christopher waited for the froth to go down in his glass, and took a long drink.

"Enjoying yourself, Christopher?"

"Rather."

Outside people passed in streams continuous as the stream of millers in Christopher's discarded toy. Mothers and aunts dragged children by the hand. Children dragged, or dragged at, mothers and aunts. An occasional man carried a baby.

The three at their marble-topped table watched as they ate.

"To think it'll be French people again to-morrow," Trimmer said suddenly.

It was what Christopher remembered from time to time: the holidays were nearly over. It was what his mother could not forget: she had left John Hemming in the lurch.

Trimmer fell to brooding; Christopher, even, for a moment; his mother also.

Most deeply, Anne. She ought to have written. She knew that, now. It had seemed impossible to write, but she ought to have written. Anne, reproaching herself, did not spare herself. She spared herself the less for knowing in her heart of hearts that she could not wholly be acquitted of a desire, however blind, to evade issues. The day was momentous as all last things, looks, thoughts, words. If the day could be tided over . . . ! It was true, then, and in not writing to John Hemming, she had given him, as the abominable phrase went, the slip! It was true. It was partly true, anyway. She had even been relieved the day before when no mention had been made of the morrow.

"Ah, well," said Trimmer. "We're very happy over there, when all's said and done."

"I don't want to go back either," said Christopher, answering what she had not said.

Ungrateful! Had he forgotten the sea and the quays and the gutters?

"You're quite right, Trimmer. We're very happy there. I don't think we could have been happier anywhere. When I think of bits of the old town — the sheltered feeling . . . and the French people. Think of some of the market-women. Granny Oxeter's chicken-woman, Christopher. 'Comme du sucre!' — 'Tendre comme un pigeon!' — 'Pour vous, madame!' The persuasiveness! And Isabelle at the Fish-Market. And the old man at the watchmaker's. Heaps of people. All friends. It's not grateful."

"There's the London boat," admitted Christopher; "and the water that squirts out of the lock gates."

"And Merridew's, 'm, where you *can* get the 'Family 'Erald.' "

"Everything," said Anne.

"I spoke without thinking," said Trimmer. "It was only another way of saying how much I'd enjoyed the holiday."

"It's not over yet," said Christopher.

It was n't, nor Christopher's mother out of the wood. What was the "slip" (when you became aware of it) but a thing to circumvent?

One of the stream of passers-by detached himself suddenly, for two persons, from the rest. Simultaneously Christopher and his mother saw him. Christopher just saw him. To Anne it was as it used to be with Christopher, when, waking out of the sleep, he saw strange faces turn to the faces he knew best. She had been looking at a tall figure in the passing crowd when under her eyes the figure became first familiar, and then (with a stab at her heart) John Hemming himself.

Christopher sprang from his chair. If she had had any thought of restraining him she could not have done so.

Trimmer's "Where's he off to?" answered itself, as Trimmer's eyes followed him.

Trimmer gave a little "Oh!"

They saw Mr. Hemming stop, stoop. He was coming towards them.

"I wondered," he said, just as he had said before when they came face to face with him in London, — "I wondered whether I should meet you."

He was smiling. Anne smiled too.

"We found suddenly," she said, — a little lamely as it seemed to her, — "that we had forgotten all about the Crystal Palace."

"And all about me."

He nodded, still smiling, to Trimmer.

"No." Anne knew that in spite of herself she was blushing like a girl. "I did n't forget. It was the Christy Minstrels over again. I did n't want to bother you."

John Hemming said, "H'm."

"Truly."

"Christopher tells me the pantomime is the next thing on the programme. I like pantomimes, too, — almost as much as Christy Minstrels."

"Then come with us," said Anne. "Have you had lunch?"

He shook his head.

"There was n't time. Give me five minutes to eat a sandwich and I'm with you. Here, waiter."

He caught the waiter's eye.

Nothing was wanted now to complete the day's ecstasy to Christopher. John Hemming made short work of a few sandwiches and a bottle of something called Pale Ale. He was ready to start off again almost as soon as the others.

The giant curtains were being drawn now which shut off and shut in the space allotted to the theatre. Through them, when you were within, you could hear as across a great distance some of the sounds you had left outside. The orchestra came in and began to tune up. People were getting to their places, sidling, curvetting, begging each other's pardons. The mothers and aunts were busy now. There was a hum and a buzz of talk, from which scraps detached themselves. Presently the scraps ceased to detach themselves, and for Christopher the huge mass of the talk rose and fell in waves like the sea — always the sea. Above the ebb and flow of it he could always hear the cry of the programme-sellers — Book of the Words and Songs Sixpence.

It had not been possible to get four seats in a row. Christopher and Trimmer sat in front of John Hemming and Anne, but not directly in front. Christopher would have wished to sit with John Hemming, but it was thus that matters appeared to arrange themselves of themselves, and it would have been difficult to change places. John Hemming could talk to him, however, by leaning forward, and did.

Anne knew the day to be momentous. Not all John Hemming's good-humoured light-heartedness could lull the sense of something impending. Under his light-heart-

edness she fancied she detected that which did not speak lightness of heart. His face, with its rather boyish expression, had in it a look which took her back across the years to another day which also in its turn had seemed to her momentous. Had she really thought to escape? Now, as he sat beside her, it seemed to her that all day she had known that he would come.

"Were you surprised to see me?" she heard him saying.

"No. I thought it possible that you might come."

This she said almost in spite of herself.

"It was quite certain that I should come," he said. "But I might have been too late, or I might have missed you."

"Christopher wanted me to write last night, but — well, I have some mercy on my friends, you see."

"If you count me amongst your friends I ought to be satisfied."

"Of course I do."

"I still think with Christopher that I might have been told. Don't you?"

"I did n't just not write," said Anne. "I thought about writing and decided not to. But I would have written if I had known. I'm sorry I did n't. I've been sorry all day."

He had been a little sore, then? She was ready to make any amends — short of such amends as might precipitate that which she knew to be inevitable, but which she so ardently wished to avoid.

"You don't know how much it mattered to me," he said, breathing hard.

"Oh, John, did it matter?"

Her eyes filled with tears.

"So much that you've got to hear. You've got to know how much it mattered." He stooped for the programme which he had dropped. "It's — it's stronger than I am," he said.

Neither said anything after that for some time. Anne could not have spoken. She believed that he could not

either. She looked at her hands which lay on her muff, but saw not her hands, but his, which were crushing the programme. She knew that the man beside her was in pain almost physical.

The lights had been lowered. The overture, which had "brought in" all Christopher's tunes, even to that which had admitted him to brotherhood of the great greenhouse, was over and the curtain was rising.

Demons in the Bowels of the Earth, a rocky place with emerald lights, were deciding the subject of that year's Pantomime. Trimmer beside Christopher was kept busy explaining in whispers. There were no demons in the fairy story. It had been the same at Drury Lane. Why? Why? "Because it's a pantomime" was not a quotation then.

"There have to be in pantomimes?"

"There always are."

Anne knew exactly what was passing. Her eyes, raised now from her lap, were on the stage, but she could still see the twisted programme. It would be twisted out of all legibleness. No smoothing would straighten it when the hands should presently release it. Oddly, she thought she would like to have it. It became for her a sentient thing. It was also in some sort the symbol of the man's suffering. It took for her, by reason of this, the pitiful aspect of relics — those inanimate things, humble, insignificant maybe in themselves, but hallowed or profaned by association. A relic in the making, anyway! It was certainly no longer a reputable Bill of the Play.

CHAPTER XX

On the stage, glittering, or comically dingy, things happened. The scenes succeeded each other to the romp and trip and swing of popular airs. Harps led you from cottage interiors where the Fairy Queen, miraculously appearing, sang her inappropriate song with the roulades, to fairy realms where the Prima Ballerina tiptoed, twisted, and postured. The blare of silver trumpets heralded the entrances of King and Court. To the clash of cymbals the Demon was shot through his trap. Anne saw and heard automatically.

She tried to shut herself in to such seeing and hearing, as the great curtains shut in the theatre itself from the rest of the building. By keeping quite still, her eyes on the stage, she tried to imagine herself to be shut off from observation, as, by those tin shades, in shape like opera-glasses, which are lent to the visitor in some picture galleries, the eyes are shut off from outer distraction. For a time she remained so, looking neither to the right nor to the left, but always at the stage straight before her. Then with a little droop of her shoulders she turned towards him.

The programme was still in his hand, but it was no longer being tortured.

"Don't be afraid," he whispered gently; "I'm not going to say anything now. I lost my head for a moment. That's over. I shan't again."

She nodded gratefully.

"You'll let me see you afterwards. I want to talk to you."

She hesitated.

"I promise to behave myself."

She laughed under her breath. If it could but be kept to laughter!

"Of course I'll see you," she said. She tried to add something and got as far as "But I ought —" when he stopped her.

"Don't say anything more now," he said quietly. "Not now."

"Still —" She must leave herself a loophole, she must!

"Please," he said.

More of the Fairy Queen. More of the Demon King. More of the Ballerina. Christopher liked everything except perhaps the Ballerina. At any other time Anne would have been enjoying it all as much as he. He turned to the two behind at every tune he recognised; included them in all his breathless wonders.

"Enjoying it, little chap?"

"Rather."

So was Trimmer. It did not, however, she said, beat the pantomime she had seen at Birmingham. Christopher did not believe her.

The First Boy won his way to the heart — a gallant boy, all bust and waist, and tapering legs nimble to the hornpipe, with a song for every occasion, and an eye for a petticoat. How bravely he bore himself! The Demon, for all his malignity and sheath of shining scales, could never for long get the better of him. He bore a charmed life. He was here, there, and everywhere, championing Beauty in Distress, cheering his old mother, chaffing the King, fighting for the Right and the Oppressed and Old England. No wonder fairies had him under their special protection. And Beauty, his sweetheart, who could help loving her? And the poor King who was in such dire financial straits, and the Queen with the bass voice who could *not* get away from her recollection of the days when she was Young, and all the rest of the familiar crew . . . Christopher felt that his "Rather" expressed but inadequately the degree of his enjoyment.

To-morrow, Boulogne again; the next day, school. Horrible! But he would have something to tell. Besides, it was still to-day. So Christopher.

To-morrow, Boulogne again. And before that, the sea! So Trimmer.

To-morrow, Boulogne — sanctuary. If it were not too late! — Christopher's mother.

To-day, to-day! If it were not to be too late, indeed! So, in his turn, John Hemming.

The pantomime was nearing an end. The transformation scene had drawn its "Oh's" of amazed delight and was over. There remained the harlequinade. Anne knew now that the moment was coming towards which the whole day had in reality been moving, when it had seemed only to be moving towards the pantomime. That was how such days of pleasuring could cheat you! Her courage began to desert her. She could well believe that she did in very truth look tired when John Hemming decided for her that she must not sit out the harlequinade. She nodded to his whisper. He leant forward and whispered to Trimmer. Before Anne knew what was happening, she found herself outside the great curtains. She felt a little dizzy and breathed deeply.

"I said we would meet them in half an hour," he said.

"Where?"

"Under the Clock."

Yet not the remotest thought of any use such as this for a meeting-place had been present to Anne when, earlier in the day, she had spoken of the great clock. She could have laughed. Christopher had called her attention to it and she had said the obvious thing — to the helping, as it was to appear, of this forging of one more link in the chain that must bind her!

"The pantomime will be over in less than that," she said indistinctly. She wanted to gain time.

"Shall we walk, or sit down somewhere?"

"Oh, walk," she said, — "walk." She wanted space, movement. "We've been sitting so long," she added.

She looked about her and at him.

From the enclosed space which they had left they could still hear muffled sounds from the pantomime. These mingled with the universal toy-sounds that made the place a huge Lowther Arcade.

"Where are we going?" Anne said presently as they walked. But she knew.

"It is n't cold," he said, "and there will be air and the open sky."

It was nearly dark out of doors — quite dark, it seemed, as they stepped out of the lighted building, but gradually, as their eyes grew accustomed to the change, what had seemed darkness showed itself to be but a half-darkness, in which all objects were clearly visible. The terraces were deserted.

In the dusk of the winter evening the gardens looked a little forlorn. But overhead were the stars.

"I don't know how to say what I have to say to you," John Hemming said suddenly, when they had walked a few yards along the gravel in silence. "Under whatever I may be feeling, you see, I've got the knowledge of what you know of me, and of what you must think of me. Well, think the worst of me (and your worst won't, perhaps, be bad enough!), but just somehow *know* that in spite of everything and through everything I've always loved you. I did then, years ago, and I do now, and — however I may have lived — in all the time between —"

He broke off. She did not speak, but neither did she make any attempt to move as he stood before her. They had both stood still as he spoke.

"You don't know what these days have been to me. I don't think I knew, myself, till I found this morning that I might be going to lose the very last of them. If I had n't met you, I believe I should have spent the night under your window in Ebury Street, to make sure that you did n't escape me in the morning. Oh, I can laugh, for I did meet you, but it's true. What are you going to say to me? I'm not fit to come to you, but I do come to you."

"John, it's not that. I don't judge you. I never have—"

"Is it the boy?"

"Yes. — No. — I don't know."

"You're afraid of my influence —"

"I'm not. That's the one thing that I'm not afraid of." She spoke proudly. "If I did n't trust you . . ." Her voice shook. She turned away.

The great glass house behind them hummed like a hive in the silence. Out here in the grounds they seemed the only living things.

"I shall never forget that to you, anyway," he said — so low that she hardly heard him.

A clock struck somewhere. The strokes beat upon the stillness.

"Anne, knowing what you know, will you marry me?"

"John, it's not what I know. It's not what you've done. It's not you at all, in a way."

"Can you care for me?"

"Yes."

She had thought of him too much to hesitate about this. She knew that she cared for him, or could care for him, well enough to love him if she married him. She did not love him yet, though he had the power to disturb her. After this day, all the same, whether she married him or not, she believed she should love him.

"What is it, then?"

"It" was so many things. How could she tell him? She had thought of her life as dedicated to the dead and the living Christophers. "It" was herself, then, was Christopher's father, was Christopher. There were other people, other things, involved also. Her mother! She in her own person would understand. As Granny Oxeter, would she? Laura and Catherine — would they ever? As Christopher's aunts? As her sisters, even? Boulogne was involved. The peace of the sheltered drawing-room, the fire, the lamp, the "Cornhill Magazine!" All these and—Mrs. St. Jemison!

"I must speak of her," Anne said presently, naming her.

"I must take her into account. Oh, John" ("it's all dreadful!" was on her tongue, but this time was not spoken), "she — she was so good to Christopher."

"Anne, I should n't be here if she would have married me. That's all I can say in extenuation of my conduct. You must think what you will of me except in this one thing."

He took a few steps away from her and came back.

"But you're not doing her more than justice in saying that. She was good to Christopher. She would be again. She was just as truly expressing herself in that as she was in leaving me. She hurt me there. I don't mind that she made me ridiculous. That's a small thing. She . . . hurt me. But she's full of kindliness for all that — of goodness even. I don't understand; I don't pretend to. How should I when she does n't, herself? Our mistake was in thinking that we loved each other — though even there . . . In a way we did."

He stopped again. She could see that he was profoundly moved.

"Yes, I am free," he said, after a pause.

They walked a little further and again came to a standstill.

"You're right to hesitate," he said. "It's a poor enough bargain to offer you — damaged goods, smirched, rejected even."

"John," Anne said, — "John!"

"Is n't it true?"

"It is n't." She drew a deep breath. "That's what is somehow wonderful. That's what I've had to learn, and have learnt. What I believe, anyway."

To her surprise she was wondering at this moment how the woman she wanted to pity, and pitied, could have found it in her heart to let him go! Some words of Trimmer's came back to her.

He saw his advantage, but he refrained from following it up. He did, indeed, wish her to know exactly what she

would be doing if she married him. She would have something to face. She would need all her courage.

"I don't want you to think me worse than I am, but you must on no account think me better." That was his attitude. "I come to you without one plea, but not as a penitent. I'm sorry enough. It is n't that I'm not sorry! But if it were all to come over again, other things being equal, I've no doubt that I should do what I've done. I can't expect you to understand. You would n't be the woman you are if you could. It's to a different kind that this sort of understanding is given, and I would n't have you different." He did not say all this, but this is what was in his mind, and in some mysterious way the substance of it communicated itself to hers. It was the answer to what had exercised her at Herrickswood when she had asked herself whether, if he had not been "dead," he could be said to be "alive again." She knew that in the conventional sense he was not in sackcloth or ashes. But she knew that she could trust him.

Yet if he asked less of her than he thought, he also asked of her more than he would ever guess. Perhaps the last thing that such a woman as Anne surrenders is her belief that though there be in heaven neither marriage nor giving in marriage, the marriage tie itself must somehow pass the gate and grave of death. "It" was no longer herself, no longer Christopher, maybe, or even Mrs. St. Jemison.

She looked at him, wondering whether it would avail anything to speak. Of the two of them, was it she who was not free?

A few people besides themselves were in the grounds now. Voices sounded near the entrances to the building. Couples made for the shelter of the paths, or emerged suddenly out of the darknesses. A woman's voice somewhere at hand said fatuously, "This is the grounds," I suppose; and a man's, "Ah, I daresay it would be, by day." A child chased another into the shadow of some bushes, and a guardian's voice called, "Don't you get lost now. If you

do, I shall take you both home straightaway." Was there, or did she imagine it, a louder humming in the great glass house? The pantomime was over.

"Anne," he said gently.

"It's because I could care for you," she said desperately at last.

"Because . . . ?"

She nodded.

"Because —" he said again. "Because! But if you can care for me . . . ! Why," he stood before her. "Why, that's everything. More than I dared to think possible. How can that stand in the way?"

She must have known herself yielding, for she could not tell him. She could not speak of Christopher's father and of what faiths and loyalties she would have to renounce — would be renouncing — if she listened. He was dead, Christopher's father; had not watched, was not waiting! All her life, then, since he died was to be made nothing. All that she had clung to, to become untrue, to be as if it had never been. But these things could not be put into words which are irrevocable. She knew the power of words. Already by a putting into words something had been crystallised that day. No, she could not tell him.

"How can it?" he repeated. "It can't, because it is what should bring us together. Oh, we must come together in the end. It can't be for nothing that I love you as I do. I don't even think it was for nothing that there was a nail lying about for Christopher to fall on . . ."

He came nearer to her.

"Anne."

He was so near to her, but he did not touch her — so near that she could hear his quickened breathing.

"All my life, anyway, is in your hands," he said. It was a whisper.

She was drowning. In that moment, as the drowning are said to do, she ran through her life in vivid and impassioned review, dwelling longest on that chapter in it which

had been the beginning of the First Chapter of Christopher's. She saw again the golden path upon the waters leading to or from the golden city; heard her own cry when out of the exceeding sadness of her heart she had cried to what as yet was not; lived again through her terror, her anguish, her lassitude, to the moment of rapture which had given a man-child into her waiting arms. Oh, Christopher, father of Christopher, Christopher, Christopher!

If in her drowning, which was her yielding, she could have spoken, it must have been to say "No" to this other; to say "No, lest I love you — No, though I love you! No. No. No."

But she could not speak, and swaying swayed towards him.

CHAPTER XXI

So Christopher's nail — the nail which had stabbed him — was the first in the coffin of poor old Boulogne. Haste to the wedding? Haste rather to the burial! No real haste, of course, for nearly two years were to pass before his mother changed her name. A nail to the coffin, for all that.

Regrets? None from Christopher, straining forward. None for the green shuttered house? the market? the Church of St. Nicolas? Merridew's, where "Cornhill" and "Punch" were bought, and the Christmas cards in their hour (robins and snow in those days), and valentines (hearts, arrows, Cupids on scented lace paper) in theirs? None for the Grande Rue with Gregory's and Howe's and the Dervaux? the Fête Dieu, when the procession wound up to the Cathedral and the eager women held out their babies for blessing? For the Fair with the Four-sou Stall — Voyez la vente. Tout à quat' sous. Au choix. Choisissez! — the merry-go-rounds, the Tombolas, the shows? For the Carnival? For Pont de Briques, of the occasional drives, the Colonne and the Vallée, of walks? For the *galantine* shop with the sausages in "silver" paper? For the Petits Arbres, where you kicked up the leaves as you waded through them ankle-deep, and where, in the interstices of the bark of the trees, the mysterious chrysalises were to be found which tweaked their tails when you touched them? For the Ramparts? — none for the Ramparts? For the splashing "fountains," then? the Sands? — surely for the Sands? Well, then, for the pier? the Port? the Bird-shop? Capécure, perhaps? the clang of the wooden shoon — the clip-clap of the wooden heels as the woollen heels above them showed rounded and dark against the lamb's-wool lining? — a sound to go with you through life! For the

cries, then? — Surely a regret for the cries: the cry of the coal, of the shrimp, of the mackerel? For Blancpignon, where Christopher learned to beat his mother at skating? For M. Delplanque's, where he learned to dance? For fried potatoes with a shake of salt? For the lock gates deeply separating the waters of the Liane from the waters of the harbour? The artificial rocks in the Aquarium? occasional fireworks in the Tintelleries? an occasional circus with English clowns? For M. Albrecht, the German book-binder, where "Cornhill" and the "Sunday-at-Home" and the "Romans Populaires" were made up into volumes (half-calf, marbled edges)? The watchmaker's, where there was the tie-pin which was a fly in effigy upon an imitated lump of sugar? — (Wonderful!) For Lambert's, where you bought *sucre de pomme* and *sucre d'orge* and could not afford to buy *nougat?* M. Abraham's, the chemist's (à propos!), where your rare powders were concocted? For the stamped *affiches* on the walls and hoardings? the herring barrels by the boats? the men with sacks corner-wise over their heads, who carried salt that looked like coffee-sugar; the men mending the road; the half-naked men taking in logs at the baker's? — at least for the half-naked men at the baker's? (Come along, Master Christopher!) For the many smells; the London boat with the black funnels and the Folkestone with the white and black? Surely, surely, for the sea itself and the quays and the gutters?

None at the time, with England ahead of you. None.

Christopher was not consciously heartless or ungrateful. He was young, that was all, and looking forward.

The parting in any case was not yet. He did not even know for a long time that there was to be any parting at all, or any change in his life. This had slipped back at once into the old grooves. His recent experiences at Herrickswood and in London were, as we may suppose, possessions, indeed. He had something to tell to his grandmother, his aunts, the servants, and his schoolfellows.

Had he any inkling that changes were looming? Were

there any signs by which he might have guessed? His mother got more letters and wrote more; that he did observe, — nothing much else. He might have noticed something of restraint in her relations with her sisters for a little while after the return from England, but naturally he did not. Full of their questionings and hearings and relatings, they did not either. It was his mother, actively dreading the telling, who could have told of restraint! For her there were days when restraint shrieked aloud. She had told no one? No one as yet. There was no hurry, indeed, for John Hemming, behaving beautifully, was not coming to Boulogne, was content to remain at the "other end" of a daily letter. Signs? Not for Christopher. Not for the busy aunts. Two persons only may have guessed! Mrs. Oxeter, though Anne, with the knowledge that she was ready to tell her at any moment, felt no restraint in her relations with her; Trimmer, who brought in the daily letter. These she would have told without further or any ado, if it had not been for Christopher's aunts. She was not ready yet to tell them. In time, perhaps, she would be. Meanwhile she dwelt over a volcano.

Christopher, notably older for his widened outlook, invited comment.

"He's grown inches," his Aunt Laura declared, — "positively inches."

"He grows more and more like his father," his Aunt Catherine.

Anne winced. Then smiled. She must accustom herself to new conditions. She knew that the daily letter made her happy.

How to tell them! She made tentative efforts, only to find that they had been a little shocked as it was. At the first mention of John Hemming they confessed to having been surprised that Mrs. Herrick should have asked him to Herrickswood to meet their sister and her son.

"It was n't as if . . . " they said — which was the sort of thing they always did say.

"Oh, well . . ." Anne said, also without finishing.

"My dear, after all that happened here," Laura said, filling in "— Boulogne, you know, where we all were! What we saw ourselves — walking with her as he did in the open street! — and what every one said. Even if it were at an end . . ."

"That was it," said Anne; "it was all at an end — over and done with."

"Over, but hardly done with," said Catherine, "while everybody was talking. We did n't of course say anything when you wrote, but as you speak of it, it *did* strike us as regrettably lax. People in these cases — oh, yes, the gentleman, to say nothing of the lady — use n't to be countenanced at all. It was not quite right of Mrs. Herrick. You, her guest, her son's widow! And then Christopher, a young boy!"

"If Christopher never gets more harm from any one else —" his mother permitted herself to say, but again she did not finish her sentence. She must not allow herself to be drawn into an argument — must keep her arguments, indeed, for the day when she must plead her lover's cause and her own — fight it, if need be.

But presently Christopher did become aware of something —something happening or impending. This dated from the day when Amélie, coming in from some shopping, announced that M. Saint-Roch, the owner of the green-shuttered house, who had watched over his property from the end of the street, was dead.

"I wonder whether this will make any difference," Christopher's mother said, and became thoughtful.

"About what?" said Christopher. He was in truth older than his years.

"The house," said his mother, but did not explain.

Well, it was to make some difference, it seemed, and it was not long before Anne heard from her late landlord's executors. We need not trouble ourselves with the business, which was complicated. All that concerns us, since all

that concerned Christopher's mother, is that Anne Herrick had to make up her mind whether she would take the house on for a term of years or give it up at the end of her lease. Anne would give it up — but it meant that the telling was precipitated. She went round to her mother's with a beating heart.

Christopher, uninformed as yet of what the visit to England had brought forth, — fruit of the nail, in effect! — was reminded now of the days of Poor Mr. Aggot and the Absconding Partner; of the days of the family consultations from which he was excluded; even of the Red Eyes. There were mysterious family consultations now; conversations which were broken off at his entrance; significant allusions to Goodness-knows-what in his presence. Something was exercising everybody. His mother could not tell him yet, dear. Trimmer knew, he was quite sure, but shook her head. His grandmother was pretty much as usual. His Aunt Laura was n't, but had a tendency to look at him with melancholy solicitude, rousing herself from time to time to smile at him, with forced cheerfulness, as one who should say, We must *hope* for the Best. She kissed him oftener even than usual, and showed an inclination (frustrated, for the most part, let us add!) to kiss him even oftener than that. His Aunt Catherine he did not see at all. Presently he gathered that there was a temporary estrangement between his gentle mother and this gentle aunt, who, it appeared, had Said more than she Meant.

What did it all mean?

"I can't bear to be disapproved of," he heard his mother say one day.

"Catherine does n't quite understand," his grandmother answered. "You must make allowances."

Christopher had come in from school, and though he had entered the room in the ordinary way, so absorbed were they that they had not observed him.

"I do," his mother said. "I want to. I do. I make every allowance. I knew — that was why I shrank so from telling

her. I felt she would n't be able to see. But when she said what she did say —"

Christopher knew he ought to reveal himself. Well, there he was, if they chose to look.

"You must n't mind her. She spoke without thinking — in the heat of the moment."

"Mother, *you* don't think —"

"No, darling, I don't. You are doing perfectly right. Don't forget what I said to you months ago."

"I don't. If it had n't been for that, indeed —"

No one ever seemed to finish a sentence in these mysterious discussions.

"And for what Mrs. Herrick said, too," Christopher's mother added.

"I must have misjudged that woman," Granny Oxeter said, by the way.

"We all did," Anne said gratefully. "She's not frightening at all. She's most lovable. Really if *she* could approve, and she would, I do think that Laura and Catherine — Laura has n't said much. But Catherine . . . Oh, Christopher, is that you? How quietly you came in. I did n't hear you."

He had not really come in quietly.

It was his Aunt Laura's "Oh, Christopher, I did n't *see* you," of the poor Mr. Aggot days over again!

Afterwards the days were seen to have been even more like those than he had suspected, when they also were found to have portended a move. At the time, however, what they portended he could not imagine. Nothing unpleasant, he was sure, for, though there was some ferment, it was plain to see that his mother was not really unhappy; and Trimmer was in excellent spirits.

His Aunt Laura, he presently gathered, was coming round — whatever that might mean; his Aunt Catherine would in time.

It was his Aunt Catherine, if he had known it, who on this occasion supplied most of the Red Eyes, though his

mother, in spite of not being really unhappy, cried sometimes, too. She could not bear being at variance with any one.

So time went on — that time which was said to be necessary to the "coming round" of his aunt. She did not come to the Rue Gil Blas, nor appear in the Place Molière when Christopher's mother took him there to tea. We may guess, as Christopher could not, but as his mother could and did (which was why she cried), what these absentings of herself meant to the poor lady who had said too much.

Boulogne threw off winter and clothed itself in the greens of spring. The trees in the Petits Arbres and on the Esplanade and in the gardens under the Ramparts came to life after their long sleep. Flowers filled the market once more, and birds — mostly in cages, it is true — sang their songs of joy and love. It was again the time of young things.

Anne looked younger than ever that year. Catherine saw from behind curtains and through remorseful tears, but would not herself be seen. Anne made overtures of peace, sent messages, wrote. Catherine held out. Mystified Christopher could not understand. At this time he seemed only to have a grandmother and one aunt.

Then on a day he met her outside the post-office in the Rue des Vieillards, whither he had been sent on an errand for stamps.

He said, "Is that you, Aunt Catherine?" and, in the "open street," as she would have said, she burst into tears.

"Oh, Christopher," she said, weeping over him. "Oh, my poor lost lamb."

His aunts often called him Lambs and things, so he passed over that, but he had to point out that he was n't lost. Used long since to going about by himself, he could not admit to being lost when he was n't.

"And you must n't be," sobbed the poor lady. "You must n't be. That's all that I wanted to prevent. Oh, Christopher."

"Why are you crying, Aunt Catherine?"

"I have n't seen you for *weeks*," said his aunt.

"Because you hide when we go to see Granny. You run out of the room. I know, because there was a chair that was quite warm last time we went. Why don't you come and see mother?"

"Oh, why!" said his Aunt Catherine. "I've offended her, my angel. My foolish tongue said things. You would n't understand. I did n't mean them — at least, I did mean them because I felt it my duty. That's why, but I suppose I see that I should n't have said them."

"Well," said Christopher, drawing on his own experience, "if you say you're sorry she always forgives you."

"But, good gracious —" began his aunt, and, like everybody else, she did not finish, or finished where she began.

"How are you getting on with your lessons?" she asked him presently. "Here's half-a-franc for you, to buy sweets — only don't make yourself ill. There, kiss me. I'm glad to have seen you."

She turned blindly into the post-office, and he scampered home.

"She was blubbing," he told his mother.

His mother went to the Place Molière that afternoon, but only again to be met with what Christopher called a warm chair.

"How long is this to go on?" she asked his grandmother miserably.

It was not the next day, nor the next, nor the next, but the day after that, that a meek ring sounded on the hall-door bell of the green-shuttered house.

"Mamzelle Katrine, madame," announced Célestine.

The two ladies waited till the door had closed behind her, and threw themselves into each other's arms. They wept luxuriously, revelling in an orgy of tears.

"Marry any one you like. Marry every one. Marry every day. Only never, never, never again let me lose sight of you or of Christopher."

It was complete surrender. The good creature could not say enough.

"I believe mamma's *really* glad about it," she squeaked. "Really, I mean; not just wanting to be. And Laura — oh, Laura will soon come round."

Anne thought that Laura had, but she did not say so.

"You'll meet him, Catherine?"

Catherine nodded.

"Receive him? Receive him, Catherine? — And me?"

"What an ogre you must think me."

"No. What you have felt was quite natural. But — there are 'buts.' You must believe that, dear. I can't explain. You must just believe it from me as I have been content to believe it from him."

"Of course," said Catherine Oxeter. "Of course."

She was ready to believe anything now, to accept anything. It became evident that she did not repent her by halves. As she had opposed, so now she was eager to welcome.

"They are said to make the best husbands," she said, wiping her eyes.

Anne smiled.

"But he is n't a Reformed Rake, Catherine."

"No, no," agreed Catherine hurriedly. "Reformed, but not a rake."

Anne left it at that. She knew! Unnecessary, perhaps, to make exact distinctions or exact definitions. If he was not "reformed" in one sense, he was in another. And in no sense was he a rake.

"I meant I was sure he would make a good husband," said Catherine.

Anne knew that he would, and said so.

Catherine pressed her hand.

"And a good father," Anne added. She pressed Catherine's. "If I had n't known *that* . . . But I do. That's why. It's all in that. Nothing else matters."

So it came that Christopher found his lost aunt at tea

that day in the Rue Gil Blas when he came home from school. It was of course she who had been lost, and not he. She kissed him in quite a different way from last time. It was a different sort of kiss altogether, and quite different, in turn, from the recent kisses of his Aunt Laura. He liked it much better — in so far as he could be said to like kisses at all (which, in fact, he only tolerated). Normal relations, he realised, had been established. But what, as before, did it all mean?

He was not to know yet.

Time went on. All the usual things happened with just something of unusualness behind them. There were no longer any red eyes. His mother sang about the house; caught herself singing sometimes, laughed, blushed, — and was singing again before five minutes were over. She bought some new hats, which met with Christopher's unqualified approval. They were different, somehow, from the hats she generally wore. By degrees her Aunt Laura left off looking at him commiseratingly or with forced cheerfulness. But the consultations and talkifications did not cease.

Something of unusualness somewhere!

It was presently summer. The town prepared itself for the yearly influx of visitors and announced "garnished" apartments everywhere. The hotels bustled, threw themselves open, re-staffed, and began to fill up. Then strangers were seen in the streets: strange sauntering family parties; Monsieur, Madame, and Bébé; strange figures from the provinces; odd corpulent men, odd corpulent women, every example of unabashed corpulence. The English arrived, — parents, governesses, nurses, children, healthy-looking girls, athletic young men; a sprinkling of the rowdy. A few Germans. Bathing began in earnest. On the sands long-suffering horses drew creaking and jolting machines up or down to deep guttural urgings, the jingling of harness, and the cracking of whips. A crowd with bun-

dles of bathing-tackle waited its turn round a man shouting numbers from a chair. From time to time as the tide rose, the chair would be moved higher up the beach, the waiting crowd following. In the sea, strange sights: corpulence, outlined here, striped, made nakeder than naked, and still good-humouredly, and even beautifully, unabashed!

Daily now the boats were crowded. From the pier, you might read by the cones on the incoming vessel the number of the passengers, and then racing her to the harbour, you might see the passengers land. England bound for the Continent generally was emptying itself into France again. No such numbers had been known since before the War.

The bales of goods on the quay near the London boat were always hot now to the touch, as Christopher played amongst them in the sun. So were the rails of the gangways through which he ran, or on which he see-sawed. Hot the asphalt of the terrace behind the Etablissement. Hot everything on which you laid your hand. It was presently full summer.

Came and went the holidays, the Fête Dieu, the Fair. A year now since Mrs. St. Jemison, John Hemming, and the Nail. Came the autumn. By then the coffin which was to hold poor old Boulogne was well on in the making. Came the day when he was told. He felt as if he had known all along! Regrets?

It was hurrah for change, hurrah for the future, hurrah for John Hemming and England.

THE SECOND BOOK OF CHRISTOPHER

BOOK THE SECOND

CHAPTER I

CHRISTOPHER, some dozen years later, entered upon the second period of his life, upon the day when he saw in the flesh some one whose name, when at length he learned it, sent his mind scurrying back across the years, with their changes and chances, to the strange night when he had first heard it. So much had happened since then — all his school-days (of which, as we go), most of his time at Oxford. Then he had been a boy with his life before him; now he was a man, if still a very boy for all that, with — well, still it seemed, his life before him.

In after years Christopher, looking back, was apt to date changes and change itself from the days of his mother's marriage. In reality, of course, there had never been anything else. Had not his circumstances been in process of changing from the day of his birth? Had not he himself, his mother, his grandmother, his aunts, Trimmer, even, — all his little world, in common with the big one of which its component parts were part? The more these had changed, it is true, the more they had remained the same thing — especially, as he sometimes thought, Trimmer. Changes and change none the less. The law was immutable.

The change from the green-shuttered house at Boulogne to the house (at Datchet) which belonged to his stepfather was assuredly a good starting-point for change. Thereafter, anyway, the changes came rapidly enough. When people were singing "Tommy, make Room for your Uncle," for "Champagne Charlie," and "Spring, Spring, Beautiful Spring," for "Pretty Polly Perkins of Paddington Green," — belated survivals from very much earlier

days, — Christopher, gaining new relations, was losing old ones. Granny Oxeter was the first to receive her summons. She died quite happily, and as painlessly as it is possible to die, in the course of the year of one of those or of kindred classics. His Aunt Catherine, then, as if she had nothing particular to deter or detain her, turned her face to the wall, and as quietly followed her. It was two years later that his Aunt Laura took every one by surprise. She did not die. She made an announcement — nothing less, if you please, than that she was going to be married. Out of the dim past had arisen, it appeared, an old admirer, to renew a timid offer of twenty years earlier, when he, a widower now and the rector of a large Midland parish, had been a pale young curate with neither means nor prospects, and she not wholly without this-worldly ambitions.

"I daresay you'll all think me ridiculous," she wrote. "At my time of life one ought rather to be thinking of folding the hands than of striking out in new directions, but James" (the rector of Misterton Sotherby's blameless name) "says there is yet work for me to do, and perhaps one should n't turn back from the plough."

Christopher wanted to know why his aunt should call his prospective uncle a Plough. But, "I daresay," wrote his mother warmly, and with gladness in her contented eyes — "I daresay we shall think you nothing of the sort! I have not been so glad about anything for a long time, and I only wish darling mother and Catherine could have lived to know. I remember Mr. Bermerdan well at Cheltenham, and used to wonder in those days how you could resist him."

So, as the green-shuttered house had been swept away and in its place — in its stead, rather — was there the Datchet house which in turn Christopher called "Home," and to which, when he was at school, he came for his holidays, so at a stroke, or at three, to be accurate, was the familiar house in the Place Molière swept out of his exist-

ence. Who sat now in his grandmother's chair by the window or the fire? Who came and went now through the *porte-cochère*, under which was the hall door with the brass knocker he had once known so well? What fingers pressed the yellow keys of the piano on which his Aunt Catherine used to play "Hark! 't is the Indian Drum," and "Gaily the Troubadour" (for him to sing), and, on Sundays, "Sun of my soul," to which his Aunt Laura could sing a "second," and "Rock of Ages," his mother's favourite, and "Abide with me," his grandmother's, and the almost too harrowing "Thy will be done"?

> If thou shouldst call me to resign
> What most I prize — it ne'er was mine;
> I only yield Thee what was thine;
> Thy will . . .

Too harrowing. Eyes would be wet in the softer seventies. Too harrowing.

Changes, changes.

Célestine was gone. She had married her Jean Poulard and was the mother now of a little Jean, a little Pierre called after Christopher's Pierre About, and hoped, if the Good God would, yet to be the mother of a little Christophe, or at least of a Christophine, to mark her tender and respectful sentiments towards the family she had served. Amélie had come to England for a time, but, presently homesick, had returned tearfully to her native shores. She was heart-broken to leave madame, heart-broken, saddened *à jamais*, desolated, but — oh, these Buts. Blood was thicker than water.

Trimmer remained. She had steadily refused to marry her piano-tuner, and as she had accompanied her mistress to India, so had she accompanied her to the new life in England. No, she had not definitely broken with her piano-tuner. He was there, as indeed he wrote from time to time to remind her, there if she wanted him. One of these days, perhaps, Master Christopher. Meanwhile for the second

time in her life her arms were full. Christopher had a little sister.

Never had a boy, busily climbing the years, a happier home to come back to. John Hemming had made no idle protestations, no vain promises or vows. Christopher had not lost his mother . . .

It was difficult afterwards to determine the exact order of the trivial events which made up life. At Boulogne things had happened before or after the war. So near London as Windsor and Eton, things happened for the most part merely to the tune of what songs ruled the moment. Thus the "Tommy, make Room" period was followed by periods governed in turn by such gems as "The Old and the Young Obadiah" ("Said the Old Obadiah to the Young Obadiah, 'Obadiah, Obadiah, I am dry'"!); "Whoa, Emma!" "If I were only tall enough"; "We don't want to fight, But, by jingo, if we do"; "La di da" (later), and the like. There was a "Nancy Lee" year, and a year of the "Bric-à-Brac" Polka. "My Grandfather's Clock" marked time. "True as the stars that are shining," "Silver threads amongst the gold," and "Molly Darling" held their own. Offenbach was giving place to Lecoq and Planquette. The Gilbert and Sullivan operas were coming along. The Gaiety was contributing to the general conflict or harmony. There were plenty of popular airs to grow up to, and Christopher was very busy growing.

Each of the holidays, as it came, saw come back to the old Georgian house a different boy, however essentially the same, or the same boy, however externally and internally changing. His father had been at Winchester, and it was there, in deference to his grandmother's wish, that he went for his schooling. His mother, living at Datchet, would naturally have liked to have him near her at Eton, but (and for this reason, maybe!) old Mrs. Herrick was urgent — went, indeed, on undefined, perhaps indefinite claims, as near as might be to insisting. Anne, after a few

tentative arguments, acquiesced. John Hemming was at one with her mother-in-law.

A very close tie still held the boy and his stepfather. In a way, it might be said that he had brought his mother and her former lover together. John never forgot that to him, and the two were firm friends. One of John's first doings in the early days was to teach Christopher to ride. The boy was found to have good hands. He delighted in this new excitement, and his rides with his stepfather were amongst the pleasantest of his English experiences. He learned to shoot and to fish. Still . . . there were other things in life beside sport: he was never, and he knew it, to lose sight of that for long. Books held him, pictures, and — in spite of a paradoxical susceptibility to the appeal, howsoever crude, of the most tuppenny tunes of the moment — music! Such people as his Grandmother Herrick had presently to forgive him for playing the piano! He ranged, be it said, from Chopin to Offenbach, from the "Moonlight Sonata" to "What's the Odds as long as you're 'Appy?" What *were* the "odds," after all?

His school-days were the tale of a series of ardent friendships — friendships, yet, in which it seemed to him sometimes that he gave more than he received. This might be the more blessed case — it was, he knew, perhaps, afterwards; it was certainly not at the time the more satisfying. He asked too much, perhaps. Did no other boys love quite as he loved? All that he had put into his childish passion for the dead Pierre (who remained his friend because death had removed him), and the living "young Englishman" (who had ceased in a sense to be his possession when he had become his relation), he put into his young adorations. Something was always withheld, or was not there, even, to be withholden. He made friends easily enough. Not one, perhaps, of those to whom he was drawn realised that anything lacked. He was happy when his chosen friend of any particular moment had need of him. He wanted to sacrifice himself in some way. "Greater love than this

hath no man . . ." *He* could, or he thought he could, have given lives for his friends.

His friends? There were so many. Was there something lacking in him, too, that he could so effectually replace one with another? Was he fickle in his affections, changeable, unstable? He ran through an incomplete list. There was Redgrave, whom he had enshrined in his heart at Boulogne, at his first school of all. Redgrave was a chubby boy, in a black smock with a shiny belt, who was cock of the walk, and to whom the other boys deferred, and whom they tacitly combined to follow. These things are determined from the beginning of time. Redgrave had condescended to show Christopher his favour — accepted sweets and marbles from him, tops and chestnuts. With him Christopher had vowed eternal vows of friendship. Redgrave had left the term before Christopher, but not before Christopher had known that Redgrave was not all that in his ardour he had thought him. Where was Redgrave now, or the devotion that Christopher had poured upon him? Where was Shappleton? Where Jimmy Hastings? Where Nicholas Minor? Christopher was at his dame-school at Windsor then, whither he went daily by train. After that, at his preparatory school at Eastbourne there were Horncastle and Hopwood and Laurence Chain. None of these were what Redgrave had stood for. There had really been something about Redgrave that asked devotion and got it for a time, but each, at the outset, had seemed potentially what Redgrave was not but might have been. Then, with the great change to the wonderful world of a real school, the search had been in earnest.

The search? It was that, was it? Not for a long time did Christopher realise that he was seeking his own — tasting, trying, sifting, rejecting. He would know his own when, indeed, he found it, as like knows like. This, then, was the answer to what he had asked himself. He was not fickle in his affections, nor changeable nor unstable. What looked like each of these qualities was a very earnest of his

constancy. His constancy to — to what? To an ideal. To something outside and yet within himself. He would know it — him, her — when at length the looked-for came. Meanwhile, looking into many faces he asked, Is it you?

Is it you? said Christopher, even when he was busiest mounting the years; — Is it you? Sometimes the words (which, of course, were never spoken) were, Is n't it you? This time I am sure that it is you. Don't you think that perhaps it is you? No? Are you sure? And he would look again, and sooner or later would come the knowledge and the disappointment. Never. Not even when he had thought — not when the lifting of the veil had seemed most imminent. The nod; the passing on; the casual and the stranger for the boon companion, for the other of the two travellers who, somewhen, somehow, somewhere, must surely have journeyed, or have it before them to journey, side by side.

Morbid? Christopher was n't morbid. You had only to look at him, at the vigorous glow which warmed him and you, at his clear eyes and fresh firm skin. If morbid mean any deviation from whole-health, Christopher was not morbid.

Something, all the same, marked him off from his fellows.

"What do you mean, young Herrick — about playing the sunset on the piano? Smith Major says you said you could."

"I did n't say I could. I said it could be played. It could, too."

"What rot!"

"I could play what it seems like to me."

"Paint it, you mean, you young idiot."

"Play it. If it could be painted, it could be played."

"What cheek!"

A very young incident, a long way back in the early school-days, but significant.

It could be played, and what cheek! The dividing wall. Christopher in his closest intimacies was to be aware of it.

"Herrick's listening to the inkpot."

"Herrick can smell moonlight."

"I say, Herrick, what's the taste of a nice clap of thunder?"

All very good-tempered, of course, because every one liked him. There it was, however, and the worst of it was that it was true. Christopher knew the sound of still ink quite well, the smell of moonlight, and the taste of thunder. He could hear, in other words, the spherical song of the stars.

By degrees he came to understand. The answer to his question was the answer to many more. A propos, he heard Trimmer's "Come along, Master Christopher." It was the deferred solution of that amongst other things. Trimmer had really not seen what he saw, not heard, not felt. Neither had his mother. Nor did most people. Yet, still à propos, if indeed he was in any way different, there must be others like himself. It was his misfortune, at school at any rate, not to meet them. There must be others, and some day he would fall in with his own.

The years were pushed behind him. He did moderately well, took a prize or two, had it in his power, and was said to have it in his power, to do better. His school reports were the reports of the average boy. They disappointed his mother a little. His stepfather, with a better understanding, perhaps, made light of them.

"It's only —" Anne said, and, as was her way when she was perplexed, did not finish.

"Only what?"

"When I think of — of the promise he showed."

John did not say, "What promise?" though at that moment he had Christopher's wonderful stepsister (who did show promise, if you like!) on his knee. He said, "*That's* all right, and so's Christopher."

"Of course," said Anne, "of course"; but could not help adding, "Only —"

"Only what?" as before.

"When is he going to begin?" said Anne at last.

"Begin?" he said. Christopher's loyal stepfather gathered himself up. "Bless the dear woman, must I explain her own son to her? What does she expect if she will be the mother of poets? Begin? He's begun. You don't have to write poetry to be a poet, or paint pictures to be an artist. He's living every inch of his life. That's his work. Let that be enough for him, and don't bother your head about schoolmasters' reports. What are they, when all's said?"

"Well, some sort of an indication."

"The observations generally of men whose occupations prevent their seeing beyond the ends of their noses." He turned to his daughter. "She should have seen your father's reports, my Fatima."

Fatima gurgled.

Anne smiled. "Oh, I should n't have been looking for anything remarkable from yours, John."

John kissed his wife.

"That's where you would have been wrong, and what proves my point. They were continually, and uniformly, and quite remarkably, excellent."

Living every inch of his life, was he? Christopher at school, and pressing forward to the time when he should throw off its shackles, might have wondered. In a sense he was. There were hours that few of his schoolfellows lived as fully as he. There were days when he walked upon air — spring days quick with the sense and the assurance of what was coming; days of summer and flannels and the cricket-field; long, long, days when the daylight like Joshua's sun, seemed miraculously stayed, and wonderful things, scents, hummings, whispers, were in the air; autumn days of quite other scents and sounds; blustering or crisply frozen days of winter. But against these were many days and hours, the very purpose and meaning of which escaped him. It was then that he felt himself shut in and shut

off by and from the common informing spirit of the community.

He loved school and hated it — left it at last as he had left Boulogne, without, at the time, a regret, but afterwards to suffer pangs of nostalgia and remorse. When it was behind him he knew how happy he had been there, and how he had loved it.

Oxford then, New; and the world once more widened. He settled down into the life as ducks take to water. This surely was one of the goals towards which he had been urging. Now he was really happy. His first year sped; his second; he grudged the vacations that took him from a life so congenial to him in every possible way. Now he seemed to have his pick of the friends that he wanted. Amongst so many he could drop the search. Is it you? It was no one or heaps of people.

Then it was that, having bent the knee to no particular woman, he met one the sight of whom weakened him suddenly. He was conscious of a swimming of his senses, of a weakness almost physical, so that for a moment the strength seemed taken from his limbs. This at the sight of a slip of a girl, tall, slender, lily-white, who with one glance of her eyes answered the question he had ceased to put, and answered it, or he thought so then, finally. Is it you? You, at last? It is I, Christy — Cora St. Jemison.

CHAPTER II

Not that he knew who she was, or was to know immediately. He saw her at Victoria Station, where he was seeing his mother and Fatima, accompanied by the faithful Trimmer, off to Herrickswood for one of the periodical visits to his grandmother. His stepfather, just then, was fishing in Norway, and he himself on the point of going abroad with a friend.

Fatima, who, out of compliment to her mother Anne and the lady of his mother's song, was really Ancebel, but who still was plump enough to bear aptly her father's pet name for her, was now an engaging child of ten or so, who hung on to her tall brother's words (and his arm and his waist, and his neck if he would let her), and worshipped the grown-up ground that he walked on. She conceived, on this day, an amiable hatred of all slim lily-white girls, by reason of one, and that one's effect, upon the big brother whom she looked upon as her special property. *She* saw. Fatimas of ten or eleven, even, — Fatimæ, as Christopher called such little sisters as his when he had occasion to speak of them in the plural — Fatimæ, of ten even, have eyes. Oh, Fatima saw!

The Continental train was at the opposite platform. It was getting up steam. The usual busy crowd hummed about it. Fatima already was jealous of it, first, because a day or two later it would be bearing Christopher and his friend (of whom, too, she was jealous) away on their short travels, while she had to do without her brother at Herrickswood, whither he might otherwise have accompanied her; and, secondly, because its air of importance threw all such less adventurous trains, as that by which she and her mother and Trimmer were to make their modest journey, into a shade palpably as it seemed to her inglorious.

Christopher and she, near the door of the carriage in which their mother had taken her place, with Trimmer in the next, watched the animated crowd. Here were most sorts and many conditions: good travellers, easy, self-possessed, leisurely; bad travellers, fussy, heated, flurried. Here were brides and bridegrooms — the usual sprinkling — and seeming bridegrooms and brides. Here were affluence neatly appointed, and affluence over-appointed; indigence (but not much, by the boat train, of indigence), showing a fair front; something, maybe, of polite roguery. Here were maiden ladies. Here were parents; families; a handful of schoolboys; some little girls, — Fatimæ, — a percentage of sunburnt Christophers; couriers, ladies-maids, valets.

"I jolly well wish I was going," said Fatima.

"Jolly well, do you?" said Christopher.

"With you," said Fatima.

"Harringay," he named his prospective companion, "would throw you out of the window. He hates little girls — all Fatimæ and kindred species."

"Oh, does he — the beast?" said Fatima elegantly. — "Yes, mother, in one minute, we're not off yet — does he?" She looked at her brother. "Chuck him and come down to Herrickswood. Grandmother Herrick would love to have you. You know you have n't seen her for a long time, and you know you ought to. Besides, we'd ride every day. Think of the downs. What do you want to go abroad for? You've been there."

Christopher laughed.

"Oh, I've been there, have I? To 'Abroad' eh? Well, I want to go there again, Fatty, so what shall I bring you? Jewels or silks or just a rose? Just a rose, Beauty, shan't I, and then, perhaps — then, perhaps —"

He broke off. She looked to see why.

The lily-white girl was coming down the platform. She was all slimness and youngness and lily-whiteness. Even so prejudiced a critic as Fatima could see that she was

beautiful. Young as she was, there was not a harsh line, not a curve that was not exquisitely rounded.

Some luggage obstructed the way. Walking beside an elderly man, in the wake of servants who went on before to prepare, she passed quite close to Christopher. He moved a little to make room for her, and, as she acknowledged the trifling courtesy on his part, their eyes met. It was as if he had received a blow which left him reeling.

The two passed on to where a valet and a maid stood at the door of a carriage which was evidently reserved. They got in, and the servants went their ways to see to luggage or find seats for themselves. Christopher tried in vain to take up the thread of what he had been saying. Fatima was looking at him oddly.

"Now, Ancebel, dear, you must get in. Say good-bye to him and get in."

Fatima, kissing him, said, "I hate her. I hate her."

He did not even ask whom, but kissed her absently.

"Good-bye, darling."

His mother was leaning from the window.

"Enjoy yourself, and write to us often."

A whistle sounded.

"Is that us?" — So his mother.

It was not. But it was the Continental train. He saw it steam out, handkerchiefs and hats waving.

Well, he, too, would be travelling by it the day after the next. How glad he was. "Abroad" was a big place, but . . . who knew?

"Don't wait, darling. I wish you were coming with us."

"He does n't," growled Fatima over her shoulder.

Then their train, too, steamed out, and Christopher, hardly knowing that he was doing so, stood blankly on the empty platform looking after its disappearing tail.

He recovered himself presently — came to his senses — and left the station.

It was a gorgeous day towards the end of July. Though the Matches were over, and Henley, and there remained

but Goodwood to give the season its final blow, London was still full. The streets were nearly as closely thronged with carriages as they had been at the beginning of the month, and even the Row, where it was the custom then to ride in the late afternoon, was not yet perceptibly emptier. Christopher, infected theretofore with his short taste of the delights of the town, had meant to ride that afternoon, but now changed his mind and countermanded his horse. He felt a sudden distaste for his kind. It was a day for the woods and cool solitudes, for sleepy meadows or breezy uplands. He was half sorry that he was not at home that he might have spent a long day on the river. But more he wished himself in Oxford, where, if late July even did not find it deserted, he could yet have found many a spot to suit his mood. And then he wanted Boulogne, bits of the old town, the silence and the mystery of the Ramparts.

All his life seemed to have pressed towards this day.

He went back to his rooms in Jermyn Street, and with an impulse to get away as far as possible from this life of London (which he yet loved), he changed into a suit of old clothes and went out again. He had no settled plan. He only felt that he wanted to be alone and to think.

He did not know London well, except, perhaps, the heart of it — that part of it, for example, round which revolved the life of the last two or three weeks — so much of the season as his terms at Oxford allowed him to have a share in. When he thought of London it was always of such portions of it as Piccadilly and Pall Mall and the Strand, of the neighbourhoods of its picture galleries and theatres, and of those particular streets and squares in which so many houses at certain times of year, it seemed, were ready to entertain him. But north, south, east, and west of certain fairly definite boundaries, he knew nothing.

Chelsea at this time, except at its outposts, was an unknown country to him. On this day of days he made its discovery. It met his mood generously. Here were houses

that breathed the spirit of other days. Here were walls of mellow brick, gardens, haunts of ancient peace. Was there a smell of flowers, or did he imagine it? Under an archway, or through an open door, were glimpses to be caught of green and yet more green. Ivies "mantled" many a casement. At the end of a passage you might see a curtain of virginia creeper sway gently as it hung from a lintel. There was everywhere the sense of hidden gardens.

And at the foot of all this the river.

Christopher lunched at an inn long since swept away. He called, as seemed right, here, for bread-and-cheese and beer.

After that he sat for a time by the river watching the craft. He was reminded of "The Waterman," of "Jacob Faithful," of "Wapping Old Stairs"—names and something more than names to one who had known the enthralments of Skelt of Swan Minories, Webb of Old Street St. Lukes, and Redington of Hoxton Street, "formerly" Hoxton Old Town—of the toy theatre generally. For of course he had known these in his boyhood. They, too, seemed to have had their part in preparing him for — even in leading him to—this strange day. The lily-white maid was foreshadowed for him, perhaps, in the Lady Elvira, say, of "Pizarro," in Ravina of "The Miller and His Men," in Lumina of "The Silver Palace." He smiled to himself.

Barges passed him with sails red like rust, steamers, pleasure boats—even the amazing Maria Wood was out upon this day for his benefit. The old civic barge lumbered by. Her flamboyant greens and reds and yellows flamed and flared in the sunlight. She was like some Dutch impropriety, some gross but good-tempered flaunting woman — always, for some reason, of the Netherlands! — with a jolly laugh and a frank shamelessness that made her beautiful. She was ridiculous too. Top-hatted men were dancing on her decks.

Christopher laughed out. Oh, wonderful day, that mixed its delights for him! Here again was a steamer.

Why not adventure further in this enchanting London that he was finding for himself?

No sooner thought of than done. He ran to the neighbouring pier. He was in time. Where should he book for? Where could he? The man in the little box suggested Greenwich through the hole in the window.

"Greenwich, then," said Christopher.

It was "Box and Cox" now that he was reminded of. He had played Box — or was it Cox? — in young theatricals one Christmas.

"Visions of Greenwich and back" for so much and so much — was it not somehow thus that one line which he had spoken had run? And Greenwich? He was back with the toy theatre again and "Jacob Faithful." All his life was bound up with this day.

He went on board and looked about for a seat to please him.

Some one else was on board a steamer now — at this very moment. Oh, wonderful! Unwittingly, by his chance decision, he had established the semblance, at least, of a connection between her and himself. From the deck of this mimic steamer to the deck of the steamer which bore her away, he sent out the current of his thoughts. In the fervour of his imagination he joined the occultists, forestalled the inventors; but was there ever a lover who did not know? If she was not thinking of him (they had looked deeply into each other's eyes), he would so batter her with thoughts that she would be forced to admit them and to think of him. . . .

Is it you? But it is you. I know that at last it is you. You know it. Were you, too, looking . . . ? Yes, you know it as I do.

Then: Who are you, Beautiful? Where did you come from this wonderful morning? Wherever you came from, it was to me that you were coming. I had been calling you. For years I have called you . . .

Then: Where were you going to? I can see you looking

out to sea. Where are you going? Not that it matters. Wherever you go, sooner or later I shall find you. Now that I know that you *are* — that you exist and that I have n't only imagined you — I know I shall find you . . .

Look across the water. Look back. I am here. Look, look, look . . .

The tide was at the flood. The river brimmed. High rode the penny steamboat bearing the dreamer. He saw the old walls of Lambeth Palace through his dream, the Houses of Parliament, Westminster Bridge.

People looked at him. He was easy to look at — well-grown, clean-limbed, and (for a dreamer) muscular. His arm was resting on the gunwale and supported his head. He had taken off his hat and the breeze blew his hair back from a low forehead. Seen thus in profile he had looks and to spare. Nor did he disappoint you when he turned his face towards you.

That day, for his unconscious sake, a shop-girl snubbed her well-meaning and innocent lover — was unresponsive and even disagreeable to the wholly unoffending for the rest of the afternoon. A young wife contrasted freshness and strength and youth, as embodied upon the seat opposite to her, with the musty, beery, middle-age of the spouse beside her. A romantic school-girl read a new hero into her favourite novels.

So, love flowing out from him (if it was love or could be!) flowed also (if this in its turn was love) towards him.

A bit of Lambeth, east of the Palace, reminded him of the fishing-town at Boulogne. Nets should hang to dry from such windows as those. This, too, was London; all London. By an association of remote ideas he thought of Ratcliffe Highway, which he had never seen, — the lurid glories of which had long since disappeared, — and pictured it as flanked by such houses. Some day, for the sake of its name, and the feelings that name gave him, he must

see what was left of it, or at least where it had been in its terrible day. At the thought of it he could conjure up visions of dancing-saloons; of dancing, fighting, drunken sailors; dancing, fighting, garish women, with their hair in oiled waves in front, and long nets at the back. All London! Here presently was Charing Cross Station, which did not matter, and a few moments later Cleopatra's Needle, which did. The water danced in the sunshine. If you looked closely at it you could see that it was not clear. What should have been sediment was churned up in it. You could see the mass of the mud particles turning over and over in it. It was cloudy as diluted milk, and it was grey where sunlight or reflections did not colour it. Yet it was beautiful. Nothing could be ugly that day — not even the imps of children who amused themselves so gracelessly upon the bridges. Here was Somerset House, grey as the river; Waterloo Bridge for the suicides; Blackfriars, to please you, who cared for the sound of names, with the sound of its own.

Presently London Bridge itself.

You had to change to another boat, it seemed. Two persons who were not going on to Greenwich looked after him.

"What are you walking backwards for?" — if he could have heard!

"Shall if I like!" — and a petulant "What did you want to settle to go up the silly Monument for at all? All those steps — when we might have kept on the water?"

"I'm sure I don't know what's come to you to-day. There's no pleasing you."

Any pleasing her! The poor fellow was right. There was not.

Christopher, making his way to the Greenwich boat, did not know, nor would he have believed that he was, or he could be, responsible for the mischief. He did not see the romantic school-girl's laggard steps either, nor would he have understood them. He could believe in these

sudden emotions himself, but that he should be able to evoke them — always, of course, except in the one amazing instance in which the miracle had to happen — would happily have struck him as ludicrous.

There was some little delay before the Greenwich boat started; then once more Christopher was being carried down the stream. The Pool of London. Big ships now — towering above you as you paddled under their giant hulls; ocean-going vessels back from China, or the West Indies, or where else you will. These, for the most part, seemed resting from their labours; one, only, buzzed like a hive. Here and there a man slung in a cradle plied a leisurely brush.

Names and more names: Billingsgate (there was always some one to tell you — the difficulty to stop the telling!), with Lower Thames Street behind it. He did not want to know, but brightened at a mention of Seething Lane, hard-by if inland and out of sight, and Crutched Friars. Pickle Herring Stairs! He could forgive the officious for giving him that. The Tower he could recognise for himself. But Wapping Old Stairs, suddenly! Wapping Old Stairs itself! And there were, it seemed, a Wapping New Stairs, and a Wapping Dock Stairs. The officious had their uses in a world where you must not miss anything. Christopher even looked grateful.

He moved none the less to another part of the boat. It was useless, however. He had to know. Elephant Stairs; Rotherhithe Church, Frying-Pan Stairs. Limehouse; Millwall (all amongst the docks now); Deptford Creek; finally Greenwich. The voyage was over.

He landed with the rest of the passengers. Here was the Ship famous once for its fish-dinners. Let be! Here were odd little eating-houses which tried to tempt him into shrimps and watercress and tea. Here were furtive tea-gardens that had an air of being a survival from other and different days. The town catered for the holiday mood.

He saw barrows spread with little plates containing strange shell-fish; smelled near them the pricking smell of vinegar. Old women sat by baskets piled with oranges, or perhaps a little stall on which were nuts and apples and sweets. A dapper-looking man with a horse and cart extolled the merits of Sarsaparilla. Was every day there a sort of fair-day in those days? With many conflicting influences, easily to be detected, the spirit of the place was earliest Victorian, with a suggestion, perhaps, of that of the Regency. Christopher half expected to hear the *vy*, *vich*, and *werry*, the *vell*, *vot*, and *visible* (or *wirtuous* or *wicious*, or *wenturesome* — any kindred perversion!) of the days of Sam Weller.

He made for the Hospital, exchanged words with a pensioner or two; saw the Painted Hall, the Chapel, the Museum. All these gave him something. Not what he wanted, however, and he turned his steps towards the Park.

A few couples were rolling down the hill!

Rowlandson, was it, who should have seen them? or Gilray? or, further back still, Hogarth — who would have used them to point a moral?

The Maria Wood (not that he knew her name then), with the top-hatted men dancing on her decks, and now linked couples rolling down a hill! Was not the day bountifully generous? The day gave with both hands. He laughed again, hugging himself.

But neither was this what he wanted. It was not till he had left this scene behind him, that the real spirit of the old park revealed itself to him.

Then the ancient trees spoke to him, the gentle grassy slopes, the view of the winding river. And then he recaptured his vision.

CHAPTER III

He threw himself at full length upon the ground, and resting upon his elbows looked down. From his place on the hill he saw the scene as a map spread before him. In it there were odd lights and shades — murkinesses, and luminous patches, smoke-wreathings, mists, hazes, milky whitenesses shot with iridescent colour, which turned for him what he saw, not once but again and again, into a monstrous opal. Or the sun, catching glass somewhere, or gilding, or shining metal, would transform the whole landscape into a setting for isolated points of fire.

It had been breezy on the water, but here in the park the air was warm and still. After the freshness of the river the heat of the sun upon his back was very pleasant. He stretched himself closer to the warm earth. It was a day for bathing, — to be in and out of the sea, — to lie naked on hot sands, to lie in sun-warmed streams, or on the hot pebbles beside them. Life was fervent upon such a day of summer. It was difficult to think that there could be any pain in it, or any sorrow, any ageing, even — slackening of the grip, gradual cooling of young blood. His eyes rested on the Hospital. He looked away and then looked back. Well? The thought persisted. Well? The pensioners down there, then — if it would not be evaded — old men whose fires burned low, whose backs were bent and limbs knotted, who dragged a leg or swung a useless arm, or stumped on wooden props down the narrowing alley of the years, — had they, too, felt as he felt on this day when he had seen his love? Had they, too, thrilled to the kiss of the sun as he thrilled now, been conscious of life, and of the joy of it, in every nerve and fibre? All of them. Not one, perhaps, but could look back to some such day and say, "Then I was alive."

The hour would come when he too would look back. . . .

Almost unconsciously at the thought, as if to make sure that the insidious change had not indeed begun, he passed his hand over his body, over his chest, his side, as he half turned on to the other, over the hip, and the thigh, and the calf of his leg. The firm young flesh under the thin flannel, the stout muscle under the firm flesh, the well-knit frame of bone under all — these, if he had been conscious of them, or wholly conscious of his action, might have reassured him. Perhaps the sense of them under his unconscious hand did restore him to his pride of them — the pride of the young man in his youth; for the mood passed. Time enough! The day, for him at least, was not far spent; the night truly not at hand. The years as yet were very long.

There were lovers in the park, and he felt in tune with them. Only lovers see. Only lovers know. Quite ordinary and even quite ugly couples became transfigured for him. A drab pair sitting side by side on the grass below him were Daphnis and Chloë. Figures on a distant seat were Paolo and Francesca, or Abelard and Héloïse, or what others you may choose to think of — so only, that they be fast in the divine coils. A young artilleryman, really brave and beautiful in clean outline and yellow braid, and his exuberant mate (though she, to be sure, must needs wear red silk gloves!) were as gods.

He looked round. What had happened to him? There were many lovers if you set yourself to look — as many as in any sylvan painting by Fragonard or Watteau. Here were glades, lawns, bowers, to people, as one or other would have peopled them, with dallying figures, with figures playing love's eternal game. The world was full of lovers and he had only just found that out. Love was everywhere. Birds kissing in the air should have hovered under drooping trees, — doves, swallows. The music of hidden minstrels should have been audible; the boy-god himself have been visible. The spirit of these things and beings was

abroad, was to be perceived, felt. What, in truth, had happened to him? What?

It was nothing more romantic than the promptings of a very healthy young appetite that in the end took Christopher from the scene of his afternoon's dreamings. By that time the first cause of all of them was well on her unknown way; and his mother and Fatima, it is probable, sat under the cedars at Herrickswood at tea with his grandmother.

Flying thoughts went out from Christopher in both directions. He stretched himself and went back to the town.

It took him some time to find a place at which, after his exaltations, he cared to have tea, but at length he came upon a baker's shop the look of which pleased him, and in a spick-and-span little parlour, which he had to himself, with a delicious atmosphere of hot bread, he ate a clean and agreeable and very hearty meal. A matronly woman, as clean and agreeable as the sweet-smelling shop over which she presided, attended upon him.

He went back to London the richer for a strange day.

"And where's that boy of yours going?" Christopher's grandmother was saying.

The tea-table was spread under the cedars as he had supposed, and the three were grouped about it as he had pictured them.

With advancing years old Mrs. Herrick had relaxed none of her hold upon life. She did not, indeed, Anne was thinking, look very different from the Mrs. Herrick who, so long ago now, had ushered the arriving Christopher and herself into the sitting-room where the velvet glove hung over the coal box, there, at the tea-hour, — Herrickswood being amongst the last of the old-fashioned houses to abandon the tray with the glasses and decanters, — to regale them with cake and wine.

"I don't think he knows himself. He goes with a friend

— a young Harringay. I'm to get post-cards to tell me their movements."

"Well, you give him a free hand. I was always afraid for you that you might want to keep an eye on him."

"Ancebel's father says give boys their heads."

"Ancebel's father knows," said Mrs. Herrick.

"But Christopher is n't a boy," said Fatima.

"Give men their heads, then," said Mrs. Herrick, smiling. "It's precisely the same thing."

No, she was n't changed. She looked at Fatima now much as she used to look at Christopher.

"You look very wise, Ancebel-Fatima, over there with your tea-cup, very wise, indeed, you look," and turned to Fatima's mother. "But I wonder whether if it had n't been for her wise old grandmother-in-law, she'd be in existence this minute to sit there and set us all right."

Fatima opened wide eyes wider.

"I wonder," Anne said, smiling.

"I always consider that I made up the match between you and her father," Mrs. Herrick said.

No, she was n't changed. If any one was, Anne was thinking, it was Christopher's contented mother. She smiled happily.

Mrs. Herrick had not finished.

"He'll be falling in love on his own account one of these days," she said, " and then you'll be by the ears, my dear."

Thus the trio under the cedars at Herrickswood.

Christopher went back to London by train. He found his friend Harringay waiting for him at his rooms, and himself somewhat at a loss to account for the way in which he had spent his day. It had all seemed so natural at the time, but how to explain? He, who generally welcomed the companionship of his chosen friends, and was delighted to see this particular one now, had for once not wanted any one with him. Why? Face to face with the question, which yet

was not put to him, he did not know. So, to Harringay's "I'd have come with you if I'd known," he gave but a lame "I did n't know I was going myself till I went."

Harringay considered this, tried it with his eyelids.

"Why Greenwich?" he said then.

"Why not?" said Christopher — "since the steamers went there."

But in his heart he knew then why Greenwich.

"You are a chap," said Harringay.

"It was also the only place that I could think of at the moment. And yes — I remember — the man in the ticket-office suggested it." Even to himself he seemed like one who is inventing as he proceeds. Yet he was not inventing. "After all," he said, "is n't this rather the spirit in which we're starting off the day after to-morrow?"

Harringay could only say again, "Well, you are a chap." And, "Upon my soul, you know, you *are!*" — which may or may not have meant anything. Nor could Christopher help him.

"You forgot, I suppose," Harringay said at last, "that we were by way of settling some sort of a scheme to-day?"

Christopher beamed on him.

"We'll do that this evening. We'll dine somewhere and go to something and talk it all over."

"You are!" said Harringay, but he agreed.

He went off to dress then, and by the time he came back Christopher was ready and waiting for him.

Two very immaculate young Englishmen were they who emerged presently from the sedate house in Jermyn Street where Christopher lodged, and who stepped into the hansom which was called for them. It pleased them to observe the extreme smartness of its appointments, the flower in the driver's coat, his deference as he stood up to lift the reins over their hats as they got in. His "Where to, gentlemen?" through the trap, told them pleasantly what bucks they were. They felt, as if he had told them so, that such

splendid young fares did him credit, and graced even the last cry in hansoms.

They dined at a restaurant in the Strand, and took the waiter's advice over the wine-list.

"If I might venture to suggest," he said, and pointed with a respectful forefinger.

Château So-and-so, to be sure, was further down the inverted tariff than either of the diners had intended to go.

"Rather a rook, is n't it, for claret?" said Harringay. "What about Saint-Julien or Saint-Estèphe?"

"I thought with the dishes you've ordered, sir —"

"All right," said Christopher.

"Very weak of you," said Harringay afterwards. Aloud, in a brave effort to recover something of self-respect for both of them, he said, "You'll see to the temperature."

"Rely upon me, sir."

Came the wine in a cradle. On less distinguished tables the Saint-Juliens and Saint-Estèphes of other diners stood vulgarly upright. On theirs Château So-and-So, like some disdainful woman, lay at elegant ease, and, her mouth having been wiped for her by the waiter's reverent napkin, could almost be heard to give voice to the Tush of her order. They were just the least little bit in awe of the recumbent bottle, whose eye, they both felt, was upon them. Would they lose their heads?

Harringay said, "Jolly good," but did not hold his glass to his nose or the light, or otherwise behave ridiculously; and Christopher managed to affect unconcern, tempered (in deference to the attitude of the exacting bottle) with appreciation. All was well. They rose in their own estimation and were happy. The waiters buzzed about them, waved dishes to them before carving or helping, hung on their orders or anticipated them. They were grown up and young, too, to some purpose.

"Another bottle," said Harringay.

"Half bottle," said Christopher.

"If you like," said Harringay, "though I think we should

have been good for a bottle." He turned to the waiter. "The temperature was just right."

"I thank you, sir."

Less than ever was the earlier part of the day to be accounted for. Reviewing it from even the trifling distance of the few intervening hours Christopher found it difficult to account for, even to himself. Had he been to Greenwich at all? Or, more exactly, was it really he who had been there? The whole thing was more like a dream. Even the lily-white maid, as he strove to recall her, was elusive and misty and intangible as the recollection of a dream. And "lily-white" — what word was this? Where had it come from? From what old forgotten ballad had it strayed? Yet without once speaking it, all day long he had been applying it, as if it were the most ordinary in the world, and as if to feel a need of it had in itself been most natural. It had sprung, indeed, to his need of what should express his thought. What was she if not lily-white? And — he could smile — what was she, what but the veriest stranger, that is, if she were!

He looked at Château So-and-So and smiled.

The pleasant dinner proceeded. They came at length to the coffee and liqueurs.

"And where are we going?" said Harringay as he lit a cigarette. It was what Christopher's grandmother had been asking his mother at Herrickswood, and the ostensible reason for the dinner.

Earlier in the day Christopher would have known what to say: "Everywhere. From place to place. Everywhere" — with a mental reserve of "Till we find her."

Now he only said, "Anywhere you like, old Harringay. I put myself into your hands, and at your absolute disposal, for three weeks."

"That's all jolly fine, but we start the day after tomorrow, and we've got to take tickets for somewhere."

"Where is there?" said Christopher.

They sent for a foreign Bradshaw, and when it had come pored over it, their young heads touching; or with the "I tell you what's" and "*I* know's" and "Here, give it to me's" of sudden inspiration, took it one from the other.

They began a process of selection by exhaustion, which should have been easy, but appeared to bring them no nearer to a decision. It was too hot for Italy; for Spain; the South generally — most of Europe could be barred out at a stroke. Why, Harringay said, a circle had only to be described and subjected to shrinkage. But Christopher did not stick to the plan for plans.

Then it was time to pay their bill — stiffer, a little, than they had intended, thanks to Château So-and-So — and to proceed with their evening; and nothing was settled. Christopher laughed.

Truly it was in the spirit of his afternoon's jaunt that they were going on theirs.

CHAPTER IV

BUT in the night Christopher woke — the fever was upon him once more, the heart-hunger with the spell. It was not that he had recaptured the vision, but rather that the vision had recaptured him. It was now the evening which seemed unreal — Harringay, the restaurant, Château So-and-So, the music-hall . . .

He lay on his back looking up into the darkness. Darkness, somewhere, enveloped her also. He wished he could know that she too was awake. He would wake her. Vague memories, inconsequently as it seemed, were stirring in him.

The darkness made rings. He looked up into it straining. He would call a face out of it, or a voice. It would open presently and show him eyes looking into his, or with his outward ears he would hear his name spoken. Christopher! But he had only spoken it — or not spoken it — himself, and the ringed darkness was empty.

He had gone to sleep to the hum and rumble of midnight, and had wakened to the detached sounds of the smaller hours. He remembered Ebury Street, the drip of the lodging-house cistern, and then, quite suddenly, some one unconnected with either. From this one he turned his thoughts away.

Then broad awake in the silent house, and thoughts, with one through all of them, pressing upon him, he seemed at the mercy of sudden clear-seeing. Everything that was happening in London this night appeared to make itself known to him. He had to lie still and to see. Beautiful and wonderful things, but horrible things also, were happening in the darkness: sacraments of love; crownings, fulfilments, with travesties of such rites and even horrors unspeakable; he knew of them all. Sleepings (He giveth

his beloved sleep), and other sleepings; waitings, vigils; he knew of these. He knew of fevers too, tossings, groanings; of the shaded candle in the silent room; the click of the medicine bottle against the glass; the tickings of many clocks on waking ears. He knew of ugly revellings, uglier laughter, tears; of sweatings, — Songs of the Shirt; — of trampings, meaningless wanderings. He knew of lonely figures slinking through by-streets, saw the broken boot and the huddle of shapeless rags, heard the voice of the outcast who murmurs to himself. He saw into prisons, workhouses, hospitals; a murderer would hang in the morning; the hands of an old woman plucked at the counterpane on her bed; a boy swathed in bandages kept up a low wordless moaning. He saw night-watchmen in empty buildings; barges on silent canals; the river; played the sunset, tasted thunder, listened to still ink and the song of the stars!

And suddenly he was back at Boulogne, felt breezes with the smell of seaweed in them, saw the flapping of the sou'westers and the wooden spades, and the yellow oilskin coats, outside a shop which he knew as the *Caleçon Shop* on the Port, and the fluttering of a blue veil which was not his mother's. The veil fluttered before him along the Rue de l'Écu, or up the Grande Rue; or down the Pier, past the little restaurant midway, where the prawns and lobsters were displayed, and the lifeboat house; or along the Terrace where the sand was blown into little heaps, or on the Sands themselves. The veil fluttered on the Esplanade, he caught glimpses of it upon the Ramparts, it was not absent from the aisles of the Cathedral or those of the Church of Saint Nicolas. It eluded him, yet shewed him the town. He had fifty impressions of forgotten things by reason of it: sand of the floor of an estaminet — sand, always sand at Boulogne; the sudden sound and smell of savoury frying; the pattern of a white cap; butter on a cabbage leaf; the way a hand held a purse, or a hand dived into the pocket of an apron heavy with copper money;

sounds and sights of the fish-market: clamours of auction; the pairing of soles; the slap and flap of great flat fish upon stone; the look of gold rings in ears or on scaly fingers. — The veil was not his mother's. He did not know it for anybody's. Boulogne was with him by reason of it none the less; not it, even, by reason of Boulogne. Sometime or other he must have seen such a veil . . . And then he was back with lily-whiteness, back with the disturbance of his senses. It was another hour before he slept.

Morning! and, as when he was a child and a child's dreams had possessed him, the fatigues of the restless night were forgotten in the interest of a new day.

Harringay was round at his rooms while he was yet in his bath.

"I'm going to take you to Cook's this morning."

But it was Christopher who spoke — before Harringay had time to do more than bang upon the door of the bath-room, from behind which came the sound of the singings and splashings.

"Well, that's what I came for — to take *you* there."

Christopher was heard to chuckle.

"We'll take each other then."

"Something's got to be settled."

"Something has been, something is."

"I want to go to Trouville," said Harringay.

"We'll talk about that at breakfast."

"We talked about things at dinner."

"Tell them to do plenty of bacon," said Christopher.

Harringay went into the sitting-room and rang.

"I say," Christopher heard him say presently, "I'm coming to breakfast."

"Very good, sir."

"Do plenty of bacon."

But he had his relapse. She was not at Homburg, whither they went first, nor at any of the "likely" places.

Harringay was to remember this trip afterwards as a curiously purposeless wandering. It was anything but purposeless if he had known it. For once, however, he was not in Christopher's confidence.

"I don't know what's the matter with you," he said when they left Wiesbaden for Aix-la-Chapelle.

"Neither do I," said Christopher. He did not even say, "Nothing's the matter," with "What should be?" for a rider.

Harringay turned speculative eyes upon him. This somehow was a new or, at least, an unfamiliar Christopher.

"I thought Homburg all right, you know," he said, rather sorely. "I liked it. And one was just getting to know people, and we had n't half seen what there was to see about there. And I thought you liked tennis yourself. Why, it was you who suggested Homburg."

"I know," said Christopher. He laughed — at himself! but Harringay did not observe the direction of his laughter and stuck to the point. It was all very well, he said — all very well.

Christopher was wishing for his stepfather. John Hemming would have known where people did go to at that time of year. Christopher could not have told him, of course, — could not, that is, have taken him into his lily-white confidence any more than he could take Harringay. But without doing this he might at least have found out what he wanted so badly to know. He had never before felt so ignorant of the world's doings. Where did people go to in August — "abroad"?

Aix-la-Chapelle he drew blank.

"Where's Baden-Baden?" he said.

"These are all Cures," said Harringay — "baths and waters. Of course Homburg is in a way, but that's different. People go there. There used to be Tables. Why Wiesbaden, for instance, and Aix? There's Heidelberg if we want to see places, or Nuremberg — dozens of 'em. Why these Cures? You don't want a cure?"

Christopher was n't so sure. What he did know was that her father had looked the sort of man who would be ordered Waters and Baths.

"There's Vichy and Aix-les-Bains," Harringay was suggesting, "if you do."

Christopher went on a new tack.

"You said something about Trouville, did n't you?"

"That was when we were starting. One had to suggest something. First, you won't start — settle about starting, anyway; and then you won't stop — stop still, I mean, let well alone. *You* know. What was wrong with Homburg? I liked Homburg."

"Would you care to go back there?"

After all, she might have arrived since they left. Her father looked like a man who would break journeys freely. With valets and maids, what were the breakings of journeys? It was only when you had to pack for yourself, take your own tickets, see to your luggage at stations, find your own places in trains, that you wanted to get to your journey's end. With everything made smooth for you, you rested here and there, as inclination moved you.

"Yes," said Harringay, "I should n't at all mind. I should rather like to see those girls again at the Springs, filling six glasses in each hand — or was it twelve? Homburg was n't half bad. I liked Homburg."

Harringay's catch-phrase — his tag for the moment, his parrot-cry!

But Christopher, who had not seen Her at Homburg, could not see her there. He had seen slim girls there, white girls, and once, with a leap of his pulses, he had fancied . . . ! There was hardly any resemblance when he came near.

Harringay — was it possible? — was saying again, "I liked Homburg."

"What about Trouville?" said Christopher.

"I don't know how one gets there from here. It would mean more Bradshaw."

"But what's it like?"
"There's bathing there."
"People go?"
"Lord, yes."
"English people?"
"Heaps."
"We'll go."

You could n't reason with madmen. Harringay contented himself with repeating his warning.

"Bradshaw," he said. "*Foreign* Bradshaw! I leave it to you."

The journey was not very difficult. The intelligent man in the bureau of their hotel managed all that for them. Their itinerary was neatly made out on half a sheet of note-paper.

"You shange only where I mark. I make a cross, crosses, shange. It is quite easy, you find."

But neither was she at Trouville. Here were plenty of slim white maids to set your pulses beating for a breathless moment, but none of them was she. You had only to get near enough to see. How could you have imagined even for that trembling moment? How could you have fancied even a superficial resemblance in this one or that to the lady of your dreams?

Unlikely that she was in Italy. Unlikely that she was in Spain. He had left Germany behind, and he was sure she was there. At some quiet place in the Black Forest, perhaps, some little hidden place. He could see her with books . . .

Of course she was n't at Trouville. Here were *mondaines*, *demi-mondaines*, actresses. He could not see her amongst these, — in a way, — though, in a way, he could. She was not of the same flesh and blood as these, but something that they (some of them) had, she had; or something that she had, they had, in varying degrees. This was the extraordinary look of exquisite workmanship, of delicacy of texture, of fineness and refinement. She, with some of them, seemed the last word, made flesh, of a late civilization.

He was sure she was in Germany. As he could see her with books, so could he now picture the sort of place in which he should have sought her. Useless to have looked for her in the highways. She was on the hill-tops, in the woods, by the streams . . .

And then, as momentarily before, but now for an appreciable period, he lost the vision completely. He became, for Harringay's preoccupied fellow-traveller, his satisfying comrade and friend. He had slipped from under a spell, thrown it off when the fairy who had laid it upon him was sleeping or hunting or was otherwise occupied — not looking, anyway. He regained his lightness of heart; bathed, swam, made friends (in the water and out of it); did not want to leave Trouville. This, though there had been talk of Ostend, Dieppe, Bruges; of Switzerland; tentatively, even, of Germany again.

"You are a chap," said Harringay.

Christopher did not dispute it. He knew that he was — or that he had been, at least, for the last few weeks.

"It was sea-air I wanted — the sea."

He paused upon that. The sea? He thought that he always did want the sea. Not quite this sort of sea, perhaps, with stripped or striped men and decked women bathing in it, laughing, talking, splashing each other; pretending to teach each other to swim. Not quite this sort of sea. The real sea, not a sea in leading-strings; a frilled and tuckered sea; a sea dressed up for a party and dancing to a band. The real sea that he belonged to; the sea which had given him birth as actually as his own mother. That sea he thought he wanted always — the sea men go down to in ships.

And upon this thought, too, he paused. It was allied in some dangerous way to the thoughts which had been disturbing him. Now that he had regained possession of himself, he did not wish quickly to lose it. He turned from the thought of the sea.

CHAPTER V

BUT he had not been wrong. For weal or for woe he was to meet her. Not now. Not "abroad" at all. He met her in London.

Much water had run under the bridges by then. It was winter. He had forgotten — not all about her, for that could not have been nor could ever be, but he had forgotten the amazing sensations and emotions which the sight of her had caused him, and he had certainly ceased to think of her. She was in her place none the less in his mind, like those vivid impressions of his childhood which no passage of time could really efface, and it needed but the sudden sight of her to tell him that what seemed dead had only been sleeping.

He met her at a dinner-party given by a Mrs. Constaple in Grosvenor Street — a dinner-party to which he had not particularly wanted to go. The pull was another way. The rest of the family, his mother and John Hemming and Ancebel-Fatima, were going to the pantomime at Drury Lane that night, and he would have liked to be going with them.

Fatima said, "What did you want to go and accept stupid invitations to dinner for?"

That, Christopher agreed, was just It; why — of his own free will, if you please! — must he needs so have bound himself?

"Weeks and weeks beforehand, too," said Fatima.

That, said Christopher, was so much the more It — the point, nay, the root of his grievance. There was nothing so unfair as a long invitation.

They were staying in London — Ebury Street, even! — for Fatima's holidays, just as his mother and he had once long ago stayed in London for part of his own. They were

doing much the same things. John Hemming often remembered. So did Anne.

Christopher, dressing for his dinner-party, heard the cab drive off; finished dressing, and presently came downstairs.

Trimmer, helping him on with his coat, gave him a motherly glance of approval. He was *her* young gentleman as his mother was her lady. It was for his sake and hers, had either of them known it (or Trimmer herself even!), that a piano-tuner was unconsoled.

She went to the hall door with him to whistle for his hansom.

The house where they had lodged was nearly opposite. It had changed hands more than once since the days which were spoken of now as the old days, and had recently been painted. It showed a clean face.

"I wonder whether the cistern still drips," he said, looking, not in the direction of the subject of his speculation, but up the street for the cab which was not in sight.

Trimmer shook her head. She did not need to be told what he was talking about.

"The red blinds are new too," she said. "They used to be yellow — at least, they had been yellow once. They were London colour when we knew them. *He's* dead, I hear, and she's married again. Settled at Buxton, I'm told. Do you remember the toy you left there, sir? She'd kept it for you, and you did n't like it when I brought it to you. You got so red, Mr. Christopher."

"Did I?" said Christopher, smiling. "Whistle again, will you?"

"But you would n't say anything," said Trimmer, when she had whistled, — "not you. You'd outgrown it, but you'd rather have died than let any one see. I don't know where all the cabs have got to. Do you know something else, sir?"

"What's that?"

"Your mamma's got it still."

Christopher raised his eyebrows.

"She has n't outgrown it. It's in her wardrobe at home this minute." Trimmer paused, smiling at some thought. "There's one coming now, sir. No, that's engaged. What's he say? Oh, *he*'ll send one. Yes, I came upon it one day — some years ago now. I knew it in a minute. Little millers, it was, carrying sacks up into a mill. *I* knew. But I said, 'Shall I give this to Miss Ancebel?' just to see what she'd say. She said, 'No, Trimmer. Put it back where it was.'" Trimmer smiled again and looked at the whistle in her hand. "Shall I go to the corner, sir?"

"He'll send one, all right."

He looked over at the house opposite. Trimmer looked too.

"That all seems yesterday," she said, jerking her head at it.

It was an open moment for Trimmer and for Christopher. Both of them knew it.

"We went to pantomimes, did n't we?"

"Did we not, sir?"

He was a little boy again for her. A little boy himself, it seemed also!

"This rotten dinner-party," he said.

"Oh, you'll enjoy it when you get there. Here's your hansom, sir."

"I'm quite sure I shan't, old Trimmer. I never felt so disinclined to go to anything."

"Then you may be quite sure you will," said Trimmer.

She watched the cab till it disappeared at the corner, and then, with a brief glance up and down the street (which she consciously permitted herself), and a longer look at the house that raised so many memories in her, she sighed, shut the door, and went back to her work.

"He'll enjoy his evening, all right," she said to herself, smiling.

Experience had taught her the right attitude of mind in which to set out to meet pleasure. But she sighed.

Christopher was late, but not the last. His hostess, a friend of his grandmother's, received him cordially, said it was very cold, and that the room was too hot, but one really did n't know how to manage, did one? — said, "Now, let me see," and consulted her husband's list, pulling at the same moment at his sleeve with a "This is Mr. Herrick, dear." She then forgot all about Christopher, and went off, the list in her hand, to some one the other side of the room.

Christopher found himself shaking hands with an elderly man with grey whiskers, who said, "Few women left like your grandmother. Marvellous woman. Still gets about, does she? Why, she must be — but we won't go into that. Eats well, does she? Keeps her faculties? Without spectacles, you say! Can she, indeed? Wonderful."

The room had the unsettled expectancy that precedes the announcement of dinner. People stood about in desultory little groups. A sitting woman, craning her neck, talked at an uncomfortable angle to a standing man. A couple of dowagers sat importantly on a sofa. There was a rattle and a buzz of talk, but heads were turned upon any sign of movement at the door. One of the dowagers seemed to be talking about a bathroom. Christopher longed to hear why the water would not go down . . .

"It was hot water, too," he heard her say, and the other respond that hot water she had always understood was *supposed* to rise to the top. That, you might be Sure, was the Reason.

He answered his host. Yes, he had been at Herrickswood in the autumn. His grandmother even engaged her own keepers. Marvellous! But he strained to hear what the plumber said.

"I had him up myself and I showed him the mark with my own hands. It was all down the wall of the little room off the drawing-room — my room, if you remember. We'd had to move the pictures, as it was, and my writing-table as well. I said, '*I* can't be expected to understand,' I said.

'I'm not a plumber.' I think I had him there. 'And, what's more,' I said —"

But what it was that was more, Christopher was not to hear. There were further arrivals and he missed a large chunk. When he could listen again his dowager was saying, "And that's why I went to Aix-lay-Bang instead of Scarborough."

Some one spoke to the host, who now remembered the list which his wife had taken out of his hand — his hands, even, perhaps? — and went to retrieve it. He retrieved the lady herself, but did not, Christopher saw, succeed in getting the list from her. As they approached, the last guest, a Mr. Heccadon, was announced — with Dinner almost indecently tacked on to his name! — and there was a general movement, a relaxing of strained attitudes, an easing of tension.

Mr. Heccadon, a welcome guest, it was evident, and a recognised, perhaps a privileged offender, shaking hands with his hostess, said that it fell to him, did n't it, to let dinner loose and earn every one's gratitude. But Mrs. Constaple said that she was too hungry to be angry, or too angry to be hungry, she no longer knew which, and that he was to hold his tongue and take Geraldine in, please, and sit opposite the fire, please, and be off with him!

She then remembered Christopher.

"Oh, I never told you, did I? And I don't suppose Jim did. Let me think. Yes, of course —"

The procession had started. He was led through it to the other side of the big room.

"Oh, I've made a mistake," he was not surprised to hear her say midway. "I've muddled things up. You were to have taken my daughter, and Reggie Heccadon was to have taken — but it does n't matter."

It was thus that it happened. Christopher found himself bowing to Lily-whiteness.

The passage from the drawing-room, across a wide land-

ing, down the gentle declivity of imposing stairs, and across a stone hall to the dining-room, was made in a dream. Christopher had observed these things on his arrival. He had no sense of them now. They made a background only to whirling thoughts. It is to be supposed that the progress was not made in silence, but if he talked he had no knowledge of what he said. Nor was he conscious of the sound of his companion's voice. Yet she, too, must have spoken.

He was seated at the table watching her, with a sort of inward vision, as she drew off her gloves, before he came fully to a sense of what had happened to him. The first thought that came to him upon that was that he did not even now know her name. The scatter-brained giver of the feast had not spoken it. Trust such cursoriness, such mental fluffiness as hers to omit the one thing that mattered! Let her introduce Mr. Herrick, she had said, and had flown to the arm of her waiting Personage, leaving Christopher to take his bearings as best he might. He was conscious now of a feeling of irritation. Yet it was to the very qualities which irritated him — by which even the name had come unwittingly to be withheld at the introduction — that he owed his present astonishing fortune. If the hostess had not been harum-scarum, he would have had Geraldine, daughter of the house, to partner, and she beside whom he now sat would have been divided from him by other diners and almost the length of the long table.

From his place he could see the late-comer and "Geraldine" looking in his direction. Geraldine, he knew, was pointing out to her cavalier which of her mother's guests it was that he should have taken in to dinner, and which of them it was who should have fallen to her. They were laughing. Mr. Heccadon, looking up the table, regretted the exchange, Christopher fancied jealously, and conceived an odd dislike for him; Geraldine, he believed (modestly), did not. He felt grateful to Geraldine.

The gloves were off now. Christopher thought he had

never seen such beautiful hands. They were young, slim, white; of lovely workmanship and finish. They might have "sat" for hands. Such hands had sat for hands from all time. Botticelli knew them — most of the early Italian masters, many of the late. Yet, except that, in addition to their exquisite shape, they had a character and an individuality which no painter of the seventeenth century troubled himself to allow to the hands he painted, it was to the portraits of Vandyck, or even Lely, that perhaps most readily you would have gone to look for their counterparts. But the perfect hand of the painters, the Hand Beautiful of convention, lacked subtleties the presence of which Christopher recognised in the hand which in the trivial conduct of the moment was now lifting a spoon. Thought informed it. It was a modern hand — a young, healthy hand, but the hand essentially of an age "sicklied o'er with the pale cast of thought." The wrists, to which his eyes travelled now, were exceedingly beautiful also. He had not dared yet to let his eyes rest long upon the face, lest they should betray him.

Suddenly the whirling in his brain which had confused him ceased. He seemed at the same moment to emerge from clouds which had confused and enmeshed him. Or it was as if he had sailed into smooth out of troubled waters.

"Tell me your name," he heard himself saying. "I want to know your name."

At his words, but perhaps more aptly at the sound of his voice, or a new sound in it, she lifted her eyes from her plate and turned to him.

"My name?"

The eyes which were unveiled by the lifting of the curved lids were blue, but very dark.

"I did n't hear it. I don't think Mrs. Constaple" — he looked towards their hostess — "said it. In fact, I'm sure she did n't."

There was an answering smile. It collected, arranged,

and docketed the lady. It was as if she had said, "She is the sort of person who would n't. You could n't expect it. One name is as much as she would ever remember at a time." She did not say this in words.

He waited.

"I heard yours," she said. "I wondered whether you were a descendant of the poet. I looked at that" — she nodded towards the little slip of cardboard in front of his plate — "to see if you spelt it the same way."

"I do, but I'm not," he said.

He wished that he could have said that he was. He had often wished that, but never so much as now. What a spot from which to take off! If he could have said, "The man who wrote the 'Night-piece to Julia' is my great, great, great . . . !"

"But I should n't have hated Devonshire," he said, half to himself, following out a thought of his own.

"Yes, you would," she said quietly.

He looked at her — if he could be said, since the mists passed, to have ceased to look at her. He believed that she changed her mind about what she had meant to say — or changed her mind, anyway, about saying it.

"Or you would n't have been Herrick."

It was hedging. She had not meant only to say that. She met his questioning eyes.

It may have been chance. It may have been her very youngness. (She seemed somehow, all the same, so much older than her looks.) It was a moment or two before the eyes of either released the eyes of the other. Then the white lids fell.

She went on eating her soup.

The look was as long and as deep as the look, months ago, which, passing between them, — strangers, — had so greatly disturbed him, which had robbed him of his peace of mind, set him wandering with the disconsolate Harringay, ended his search and begun it. Was it possible that she remembered, knew him again? Was it possible?

Again the clouds threatened to engulf him. The whirring started afresh. He had a physical sensation of dizziness, during which for an instant, but only for an instant, he caught the eye of the man called Heccadon. He must control himself. People would see. She herself would see.

She finished her soup. His own, scarcely tasted, he pushed from him.

The party had settled down to the serious business of the hour. He heard scraps of talk detached from the babel of voices. The dowager with the bathroom was abusing the prime minister.

"Nor am I saying to you what I have n't said to him," he heard her say. "He knows what I think. I said to him myself, I said, 'If you think,' I said —"

A louder gust of other people's talk drowned her utterance. But, "I think I had him there," Christopher did hear. Another case of the Bathroom and the Plumber!

A woman with a weather-beaten face and a tiara, nodding her head to whitebait, was talking stable. Christopher heard something about Sore Backs.

An authoritative little man was asking for whiskey and soda.

So, all eating and each engrossed with the concerns of the moment, they talked, while wonderful things happened to Christopher. What wonderful things! He had not wanted to come to this party, he remembered, and, quickly, as a rider to the thought, recalled Trimmer's prophecy.

"You have n't told me," he said.

The white lids were raised again.

"Told you?" But she remembered. "Oh, my name."

There was the briefest pause, but a pause. Then a footman interposed between them with a dish. Christopher was thus denied the satisfaction he sought for still a little longer. He believed that this was because the thing was of such tremendous import to him, that even such outside agents as servants and dishes must contribute to keep her

reply "suspended." He did not chafe at the momentary delay, or resent it.

"What were we saying?" It was she this time who seemed to have caught the eye which had caught Christopher's. But with her as with him the thing was momentary, and he was hardly conscious of observing it. "Oh, yes, my name. We branched off at yours, did n't we? We got as far as Devonshire."

Her name, which she then told him, took him, as we know, not farther, not so far indeed, but in another and a very different direction.

CHAPTER VI

WHEN he came back from his mental journey to Boulogne he thought he had always known. It was as if, behind his ignorance, had lain knowledge. She was Mrs. St. Jemison's daughter — daughter of the Mrs. St. Jemison of long ago who could not be called upon. It hardly occurred to him to doubt that. There could not be two Cora St. Jemisons — or, as there were or had been two (for who could say what one Cora St. Jemison's name might or might not be by this time?), there could not be three.

Christopher inherited tolerance, perhaps, from his widely different grandmothers, the tolerance of each of whom in turn, arrived at in widely different ways, was sufficiently unlike that with which her grandson was dowered. Granny Oxeter's had been the gentle tolerance of pity and understanding; his Grandmother Herrick's was good-humoured, half-contemptuous — the easy indifference of one who has seen the world at too close quarters to expect very much of it. Christopher's had understanding in it, some gentleness, not a little whimsical indifference. It had, however, another quality which was wholly absent from that of one of his good grandmothers, and only present in negligible degree in that of the other: something of that bold sympathy with the law-breakers which comes, itself, of an impatience of restraint. Rightly or wrongly, he did not — or he thought he did not — condemn Mrs. St. Jemison, or any Mrs. St. Jemisons, out of hand.

The sudden knowledge, then, was not, for the moment at any rate, at all of the nature of a shock to him. His first feeling, indeed, was that, though she did not know it, something had been established between them.

"Why, then —" he began eagerly, but broke off.

What had he been about to say? Good Lord! And by how little he had escaped saying it. He held his breath. It was not — or not alone, anyway — that he had been on the point of speaking of her mother, but that, if he had spoken of her, it must have been of her at the particular period of her life at which he had come into touch with her. He remembered, hot and cold, the groups on the sands, the looks askance, all that was said, all that he had observed but had not understood then. It had not been till years afterwards that he had understood. By that time the recollections, happily, were dim enough, and the fact of his stepfather — his affection for him, his acceptance of him, the very habit of him — firmly enough established to divest of any power to disturb him all such misgivings as fuller understanding might have occasioned him. For himself he took things and people much as he found them, and as, for himself, he had accepted John Hemming to stepfather, so, for the girl beside him, he could accept Mrs. St. Jemison to mother. Thus the knowledge, as it might have been expected to influence his feelings for her, — fair daughter of frail mother, — touched him not at all. As it might affect her herself, his sensations of the last few moments showed him that it affected him profoundly.

He stammered, found words with which to extricate himself, and played with the fish on his plate. The dangerous moment passed.

Yet even as he drew breath, he wondered whether in truth the moment had been dangerous at all. Did she know? — what did she know, rather, — how much even? She had been little more than a baby when her mother was amusing herself in throwing her cap over the windmill — in seeing, perhaps, how far it was exactly that she could throw her cap over the windmill. The nine days were some hundred times over now, but memories were long. She could not fail to know that the St. Jemison cupboard held a skeleton. She could scarcely fail to know its nature.

Afterwards, wonderful as the evening was, it seemed to him, since it passed without his learning whether or not she remembered him, to have been made up of missed opportunities. Half a dozen times the question was on his lips. The simplest thing — just to ask! But he could not. Instead, he talked of everything else, and watched her — learning her face by heart. Whether the exercise made him happy or unhappy he did not know. Certainly it baffled him, — as at such moments when he surprised in her graveness a laugh somewhere, — behind her eyes, was it? or elusively about the corners of her mouth? He could not tell. But the graveness and the laugh were both there. The two together made him feel again how much older she was than her years. They made him with a sudden recollection of the recumbent Château So-and-So — irrelevant here, surely, to the point of absurdity! — feel something else, too: younger as he knew her to be than himself, how much older she was, somehow, than he was — how much older than he, perhaps, would ever be. She was young as a spring leaf, and there were moments when she was old as Time.

In reality, of course, she was young as the spring leaf. The Cora of his dreams must be, the Cora — since she was Cora! — who had claimed him (if she had claimed him?), who had known him at once (if she had known him?), who had met his outspoken "Is it you?" clearly, unfalteringly, finally, with "I, Christy, I!" — as who should say Once and for Ever.

Had she? Had she not? Had she?

Happy? Unhappy? Both.

He looked over in her direction and saw that the man with the odd name was talking to her. But even as he looked there was a move and the party began to break up. She came over to say good-night to her hostess, and as she passed him she held out her hand.

Outside the night had changed. Christopher walked back to Ebury Street on wet pavements, but also on air.

The air which he trod dried the pavements, perhaps. He hardly perceived that rain had been falling. Happy? Unhappy? Happier than ever before in his life.

The Hemmings were going home at the end of that week, and Christopher went with them — thought himself able to go with them. He had lived for three days then upon what the wonderful evening had given him. It seemed enough for him at first that the thing should have happened; enough that he should have seen Cora St. Jemison, heard her voice, touched her hand, learned her name, even if her name must of necessity cause him some misgiving. So back, unthinkingly, he went with the rest, and for a time was content.

The old house, which was "home" to him, seemed more than ever delightful after the Ebury Street lodgings. He loved the broad window sills, on which in the summer he would sit with a book and his legs drawn up to make room for the length of them; the old-fashioned hearths, the low ceilings, the leisurely staircase. His stepfather had inherited the house, almost as it stood, from an old uncle who had lived an unhurried, orderly life in it, preserving its ancient peace. Christopher loved it, had grown to it, as, in the impressionable days, he had grown to the old French town to which, though he had left it as we know without a pang, he always looked back with such affection. Now it suited his mood, as perhaps never before. He wanted to think — resting, as a rower on his oars.

He had something to go upon now. Though he had missed his opportunities — even wasted his chances, he had something to go on. He might not see Cora St. Jemison, — could not, indeed, — but now if need were he would always be able to find her. No longer could the wide world engulf her. With a name, she had also a local habitation. He had only to ask to know where. He could wait, or he thought he could, to see if indeed need would "be." He was sure he could wait.

He saw life slide back gently into its old grooves. He rode with John Hemming and Fatima; walked or drove with his mother; read, smoked, played the piano. Nothing seemed changed.

And then everything seemed changed.

He could not stop. He must get away. She was in London, and here was he twenty miles distant. How had he thought he could stand it?

It was Fatima who lifted up her voice when he announced his intention of going back to London. His mother, wiser in her generation, said nothing. It had been a great delight to her to have him with her. Oxford absorbed so much of his year, and when Oxford released him, so many people wanted him. She loved to have him at home, but if he wanted to go he must go; so, to the rebellious Fatima, it was "Nonsense, Ancebel. You must n't bother him." No one must bother him. It was always like that. But just sometimes Anne looked back to the time when Christopher had been a little boy and she had had him to herself. At such moments, happy as she was with her husband, — even because she was so happy, — she sent a piercing thought to the lonely grave over the seas. Once Trimmer caught her with tears in her eyes. But Trimmer was Trimmer, and knew.

Fatima, less considerate, must wrestle with the adversary for the body of her beloved Christopher. This, though she did not know that there was an adversary! Not long did she remain ignorant.

"What do you want to go to London for?" she urged. "You've been there."

It was what she had said when "Abroad" had been the question. Her wits were fiendishly nimble. Her words caused the one occasion to remind her of the other. The adversary, thereto unsuspected, took immediate shape for her. Nimble indeed the wits of Fatima!

"It's some girl you've fallen in love with." That was

easy. Any one might have said that. But "It's that girl at Victoria — who looked at you on the platform!"

It took an Ancebel-Fatima to have seen, and, having seen, to remember, and, having remembered, to say that.

Christopher was startled.

"What girl?"

"In the summer when mummy and I were going to Herrickswood and you would n't — that" — Fatima had n't done! — "that white girl."

"White girl?"

It was almost uncanny.

"She was white — that's how one would think of her."

It was extraordinary. Christopher for an instant showed himself startled. He looked at Fatima blankly, and an amazed "Good Lord!" nearly jerked itself from him.

He was packing. His room was strewn with things. Clothes were piled up on the chairs, — trousers, coats, waistcoats; and the bed was covered with shirts. He was not coming home again before he went back to Oxford.

Fatima, clearing an indignant place for herself on the bed, did not fail to perceive.

"You know as well as I do. It's months ago. But I saw. You thought you looked through into each other's hearts like people in books —"

"If little girls are going to talk nonsense —"

"It's the looking that's nonsense. You don't want her —you only think you do. You're blinded. You thought she was the one person in the world. I saw you think that at Victoria. I knew at once what you were thinking. I always do — what every one is, I mean. Father, mother, Trimmer — every one. Especially Trimmer. I've always known what she was thinking all my life. So of course I knew what you were. It was" — Ancebel-Fatima gathered herself up — "it was No Ordinary Look."

"No Ordinary Thinking," said Christopher. He laughed to himself. "'No Ordinary Look!' You know, *you've* been reading novels, my dear, — and jolly bad ones at

that! I shall have to warn your parents and guardians to look after you a bit more, and to supervise what you fill your young head with. 'Through into each other's hearts'! 'Blinded'! The 'One person in the world,' indeed! Penny novels, you know, Fatima. Not to be thought of. Not — to — be — thought — of."

He had her by the leg now, she him by the throat. They might scuffle like children, however, and they did, — for a quarter of an hour by the clock on the mantelpiece! — nothing could alter the facts. Fatima knew. Christopher knew that she knew. She even knew this.

Released by him, presently, and releasing him in turn, she fastened upon the adversary — sought by disparagement to defeat her in his eyes. Who was she — a girl on a platform? A stranger. Some one you passed in a crowd. Where did she come from? He might know now, but he had not known when the "spell" (Ancebel-Fatima's actual phrasing!) — was "cast" upon him. Any Girl from Any Where. That was who she was! And was this the sort of person . . . ?

"You've been reading novels," said Christopher again, "and listening to charwomen."

He might laugh, though, as he did, — even to causing the flushed and spluttering Fatima through all her indignation to laugh too! — there was that, none the less, which was not laughter in his face. He was chafing to be up and off. Something stronger than little sisters had come into his life. Fatima, understanding but dimly, perhaps, for all her impish precocity, saw for all that.

She wrestled to the last. He left the next morning.

London again; St. James's; he went back to his old rooms.

It was from his old rooms — while he was staying in them, that is — that he had first seen her; from them that he had set out upon the day's adventures which had given him Chelsea, the river, and Greenwich; from them he had

set forth on his quest. Poor Harringay! How he had tried him! He had not found him wanting, either, when all was said and done. There would be no Harringay this time, no any one to bother, no one but himself.

He had no settled plan. Somehow, that was all, he meant to see Cora St. Jemison. He did not know yet how this was to be accomplished, but he intended, come what might, to accomplish it.

London was under a pall of fog. There were such fogs in those days, recent though they be, as in these we have almost forgotten. Datchet had been clear, the railway lines, while Christopher waited on the platform, even gleaming in wintry sunshine. At Wraysbury (God help us!) the train had entered a whitish mist. By Richmond the mist had nothing of white in it, and thickened thenceforward. Coughing, grunting passengers took their seats dismally and brought dampness into the sombre carriages. By Waterloo the fog was pea-soup.

He had telegraphed to Jermyn Street, and a bright fire welcomed him there, doing its best to dispel the gloom of his sitting-room. While his landlord, who always valeted him, unpacked for him, he tried to determine what he should do. London was of course dreadful to-day, but it was dreadful in a big sort of way. Only London could do what London was doing, only London could be what London was. He did not wholly dislike the fog which had caused his fellow-travellers such distress and inconvenience. There was something not uncosy in the murkiness. From the hearth and with a sense of pleasure he listened to the man moving quietly about in the next room, opening drawers and closing them, pulling out or pushing in the trays in the wardrobe, opening or shutting its doors. A drawer stuck for a moment, and he heard the restrained sounds of the adjustment of it and then of its easy sliding home. There was no impatience, no undue haste. The fog shut him in with pleasant things, and his spirits, which had sunk a little in the train, began to rise.

What to do? Somewhere in the darkness was Cora St. Jemison. She at this moment was shut into some lamp-lit, fire-lit room. The fog, isolating every room, turning every lighted room into a lantern swinging in the blackness, brought him very near to her.

"Mr. Jellicoe."

"Sir," from the inner room.

The sounds ceased. His landlord appeared at the folding doors.

"Have you such a thing in the house as a Red Book?"

Mr. Jellicoe thought so, and would see. The darkness of the passage and the stairs swallowed him. Christopher went to the window and looked out. Thick yellow waves rolled up against the glass. He could see the movement in what looked like stillness, presently could almost see the particles turning over and over in masses, as he had seen the churned mud turn and turn in the waters of the river. The fog itself was like a river, a flood, a sea! Now the window was like the glass wall of a tank in an aquarium, through which you look to see the strange doings of strange fish. So like indeed that Christopher would not have been Christopher if, while he waited, he had not conjured up the shapes of scaly creatures to swim, in the yellow murkiness, close up to the glass, there with mouths and fins and tails working automatically, to gaze at him for a moment before whisking away, with a flash, perhaps, as of tarnished silver, into the further obscurity. So engrossed was he with his fancies that Mr. Jellicoe's voice startled him.

"One of my gentleman's, sir, — Colonel Whipple's. My own was not quite so recent. Colonel Whipple begged you would keep it as long as you wished, sir."

Christopher took the book, sending a message of thanks to its owner, and Mr. Jellicoe withdrew. The sounds of the interrupted unpacking were continued for a minute or two, and then the shutting of a door followed by silence told Christopher that the thing was done. His clothes, neatly folded and arranged, lay commodiously, he knew,

in the drawers. His brushes and combs and shaving-tackle were set out orderly on his dressing-table. Everything, he would find, lay where his hand would most readily light on it.

He looked at the book, which he had not yet opened. As the name had been withheld from him for spaces of time which had seemed protracted, so now he was withholding from himself what the red volume might have to tell him. He had only to look; he knew that. Somewhere in black London lived Cora St. Jemison, and the book he was holding knew where. It was deliberately that up to that moment he had not sought to know where she lived. He had liked to know that he did not know, but could know. He had dallied with this feeling for so many days that he was reluctant to part with it. Why? Explain the lover — any lover — even to himself!

Well, now he did want to know. The need, which from the beginning might be, was. He opened the book and turned to the Saints.

St. Germaine, St. Germans, St. Hill, St. John, St. Leger, St. Leonards, St. Oswald . . .

The name was not there. He left the Saints and turned on. After Sterling and Stevens came Stock.

He went back to the Saints, doubting his eyes. But the book must be wrong, the list incomplete. St. Jemison must be left out in error. Between St. Hill and St. John there must be names which were here unrecorded. Besides, he knew that the St. Jemisons had a house in London. He had heard his Grandmother Herrick, who had known them years ago, speak of it. He rang, and, a servant answering the bell, he sent down a message asking if he might see Mr. Jellicoe's own Red Book, which, he had understood Mr. Jellicoe to say, was an old one.

Mr. Jellicoe himself appeared with the volume.

"I'm ashamed to bring it, sir. It's more than ten years old, I find."

"Just what I want," said Christopher. He believed now

that Mr. St. Jemison had had a house in London, and in all probability had disposed of it!

St. Germans, St. Hill, St. Jemison. There it was: St. Jemison, Oswald, Esq., 3 Wolf Street, Mayfair. St. Hill, St. Jemison, St. John. Christopher owed the book an apology.

Mr. Jellicoe, retiring, was apologising in turn for his copy.

"Nearly eleven years old, sir. I'll get a new one to-day. Almost a reflection, so to speak, on the house."

"Nonsense," said Christopher, a little abruptly but with a smile. He rallied himself. "You're admirably supplied with everything: Bradshaws, A B C's, Postal Guides — all one can think of. How should one expect to find Red Books in rooms?"

"We had rather prided ourselves, Mrs. Jellicoe and myself, upon the house being well found, sir."

Check, then! Not so simple a matter as Christopher had supposed. He went back to the tank and watched for fish. But he had lost the illusion of an aquarium. It was fog that he looked into now, fog pure and simple, — or impure and complex! — from a third-story London window. What to do? Walk London as he had walked the world? He went to the table where the two books lay, and compared the entries as he might have compared accounts. "St. Hill, St. Jemison, St. John," and "St. Hill, St. John." If you could but "balance" the thing: subtract St. Hill and St. John from St. Hill, St. Jemison, St. John, and get St. Jemison, with its "3 Wolf Street, Mayfair," as a remainder!

Actually, of course, he knew what his next move might be. Mrs. Constaple, his hostess of the wonderful evening, erratic as she was, must know something of the whereabouts of one so recently her guest. She would know anyway where Miss St. Jemison had been living or staying on the night of the dinner-party. Yet how to find out sufficiently casually? And how, for this purpose, to make sure of seeing her? The second of these questions was in point

of difficulty the first. He did not want to waste a visit. He had still, it is true, to "call" after dining, — a ceremony more punctiliously observed in those days than now, — but if he did call, and the good lady should be out or even Not at Home, what then? What excuse would he have for going again? Easy enough, perhaps, to be casual, but how to compass the opportunity?

He found himself out of doors presently. Four walls would not hold him. Four walls did not even seem any longer to hold Cora St. Jemison. With the knowledge that he could not be sure that she was in London at all, he could not think of her room as a lantern pendant, somewhere in the darkness, to his own.

The fog had not lifted. Rather did it seem to have thickened. On the pavements, even, the going was careful. People stopped each other to ask where they were, but mostly with amusement. A cheerful old woman wanted Knightsbridge. Her voice and a twinkle in her old eyes attracted Christopher, who took her by a fat arm and piloted her into Piccadilly. There, upon the south side of the street, there would be a straight quarter of a mile which she might pursue in comparative safety. He offered to go farther with her, but this she would not allow.

She was as right as rain, she declared, once she knew her direction, was a merry old body, and chuckled her thanks. He regretted her when she was gone.

In the roadway the traffic moved at a snail's pace to the sounds of hoarse cries. There was yet even here a feeling of cheerfulness in all this discomfort. It was "'Old up, there," and "Where are y' comin' to, can't y'?" with a tendency to banter upon the smallest occasion or none. Christopher felt his spirits rise again. He forgot his unrest and surrendered himself to the influences of another sort of strange day.

CHAPTER VII

He made for Wolf Street. He would look, at least, at the house where once she had lived — if only as a child. That it would be impossible to see it, was a small thing to one who just now was less Christopher than Romeo. Fatima had not been far out of her young reckoning when she talked of a "spell." The white girl had assuredly used enchantments.

He crossed Piccadilly, steering a hazardous course through the moving mass of vehicles, and under the heads of the horses. Who left the pavement, that day, cast off and trusted himself to the open sea. Christopher, forced by the exigencies of the moment to take an oblique direction, landed, not opposite Arlington Street, where he had parted with his old woman and whence he had started, but between Dover Street and Albemarle Street. He crossed Dover Street then, and Berkeley Street, and rejecting Stratton Street for a *cul-de-sac*, rejected Bolton Street also and Clarges Street. When, a few moments after, he found he had passed Half Moon Street as well, he turned up White Horse Street, and lost himself in Shepherd's Market. Five minutes later he found himself inexplicably back in Piccadilly!

He found Wolf Street, however, eventually, and made out Number 3. He saw it better — saw more of it, indeed — than he might have expected, for lights were burning in the lower rooms and the blinds were up. Under cover of the darkness he permitted himself to look in.

Strange the lover's obsession by reason of which one spot should be hallowed over another, one house picked out from its fellows, and for no qualities of its own made separate, made wonderful!

To Christopher there was something of mystery and enchantment in the house before which he stood and into which, like any gaping errand-boy who hangs on to area railings, he gazed. Not that he, Christopher, was hanging on to railings. He was standing quietly on the pavement, a tall slim figure, shrouded in fog, but as deliberately and unashamedly was he violating the sanctities of a stranger's hearth.

What satisfaction he got from the odd exercise it would be difficult to say. The room was a library, but it might not always have been a library. Nothing may have been as it was in the time of the St. Jemisons. Still, it seemed probable that the room had not been much altered. The shelves which lined the walls looked as if they had always been there. The stuffed leather chairs were such chairs as assuredly ought to have been there. There was a large writing-table. There were branch candlesticks on the mantelpiece. The red Turkey carpet looked soft.

A comfortable, well-appointed room, in which doubtless some one lived a comfortable, well-appointed life. A score of such rooms lay within a hundred yards of where he stood.

Then, as he looked, the door opened. Some one was coming in, and — so much grace had he! — he moved at once to move away. But even as he moved something happened, something so extraordinary, or at least so unexpected, that, like a veritable errand-boy, he did now — though for a very different reason — hold on actually to the spear-heads of the railings. He held on to them while the world turned round. For into the room had come a girl, and under his astonished eyes the girl, who at the first glance was just a girl like any other, grew first vaguely familiar, and then, with a suddenness which took his breath away, became miraculously but indisputably Cora St. Jemison herself.

How long, after this miracle, he hung to the railings he did not know. It was a servant in the end who dislodged him

— a kitchen-maid, with a cold in her head and a scuttle in her hand, stepping across the area to fetch coal. The fog, away from the light of the windows, swallowed him up.

When he came to himself he had walked as far as Oxford Street.

The fog now began to lift. It was as if it had played its part and might go. All this for Christopher? All this. Light showed through from above. Though there was no perceptible breeze, masses of dirty vapour must be rolling away overhead. He thought he could see them so rolling off, as, a short while back, he had seen them rolling up to his window. Horses, carriages, people, began to take definite shape.

Christopher's spirits now rose to boiling-point. He might ask himself, What now? he might ask himself what he wanted, he might puzzle himself with all the questions that ever were or ever would be! nothing would thenceforth persuade him that for this day at least the gods were not upon his side. The fog itself had come that, out of the darkness of it, he might see into a lighted room!

He walked down Park Lane. The houses were breaking through now, the railings, the trees. At every yard the day grew lighter. His heart sang to the tune of the coming light. He watched it creep over the town, driving the darkness before it.

Again he could rest. He could even have found it possible to go back to Datchet. He understood once more how and why he had been able to go home with the others — a thing which, less than twenty-four hours ago, had seemed incomprehensible. No longer was he driven. He could rest.

Quite idly he watched the happenings of the moment: a wagon with sturdy horses pursuing a rumbling, leisurely way; a hansom, made topheavy with a trunk, swinging loopwise and ridiculously on its springs; two omnibuses

abreast, dallying with a temptation to race. Looking at these he wanted them not to resist the temptation; but when they did resist it, he acquiesced contentedly in what was after all their better judgment. Then a girl in a tight, shabby satin dress, with a milliner's cardboard box on her arm, came into the scheme of things, and was stopped with a touch on the shabby satin arm by a young postman. Lovers! He saw lovers as he had seen lovers at Greenwich. Lovers suddenly were everywhere — people in couples. He turned into Tilney Street that he might look at the house where Mrs. Fitzherbert had lived and loved . . .

God *was* in His heaven. All *was* right with the world.

And then Christopher knew that he was hungry.

He took a hansom and drove to the Strand. The day had taken him back to the other wonderful day, and it seemed fitting that he should lunch where he had then dined, and, above all, that he should drink Château So-and-So.

A waiter waved him to a table, but he looked at another which was occupied. Nor was he to be baulked of it for the waving of napkins, howsoever persuasive. He intended to sit at the table at which Harringay and he had sat. He waited for it till it became vacant, which happily was almost at once, and looked on relentlessly as it was prepared for him.

He ordered a modest lunch and took up the wine-list.

Château So-and-So was not there!

Not there! He looked again, doubting his eyes.

Château So-and-So was not there. It was like St. Jemison and the Red Book. It was the Red Book and St. Jemison over again. Not there? Château everything else. But it must be. Even if it was n't, it must be. Came the waiter; came the waiter who looked after the wine; came the Head Waiter. Consultations. (Growth of importance for Christopher!) A going to see.

But the day was not going to fail him. Return of the

Wine-Waiter triumphantly. There was just one half-bottle left — just one solitary pint. Half a moment, sir, and the man withdrew. But Christopher knew what it was. A cradle for the solitary pint. That was it. Château So-and-So came back reclining, warmed — a Tush on her lips — indolent, insolent, delicate, delicious as her mother! Christopher had not been wrong. The day could not fail him.

He ate, slowly enjoying, conscious of enjoying, what was set before him; thinking, but hardly conscious of thinking. It was thus that, without knowing that his mind was working actively, he reasoned out, as he ate, an explanation of the St. Jemison presence in Wolf Street. It was all quite simple. After the scandal Mr. St. Jemison had let the house — probably for a term of years — and now had gone back to it. If he, Christopher, had looked up Wolf Street instead of St. Jemison itself, the silent Red Book would even have told him to whom. Simple, you see, as A B C. But the marvel of the fog and the lighted room and of the entering Cora remained.

Cora became again the most beautiful name in the world. He lingered over the values of the syllables which composed it, as he lingered over the luncheon. "Cora." It expressed the Cora of his dreams and imaginings — if, or as, it also expressed her mother! But even at this he did not frown. There was something. He could not help knowing it. In his search, had it not always been in girls of one type that he had seen the escaping likeness which, for the instant of its duration, had set his heart thumping or stopped it? There was something. But it was part of the charm.

He paid his bill and went out. The crowded Strand received him — accepted him, as once it was the Crystal Palace which had accepted him. The song of the moment — it may or may not have been "White Wings" then — was in the air, and in his ears with countless other sounds.

London always hummed for him to the tune of some song. Every year, since he had first become aware of such songs and the part they played, added another to his collection. If it was not "Get your hair cut," or "What cheer, Ria," it was "Little Annie Rooney." The more the songs altered, the more they were the same thing. The town which had capered to "Champagne Charlie" in its day, and swayed to the waltz-time of "Mother Shipton," had not learned to kick up its heels yet to the jerk and thump of "Ta-ra-ra," nor mastered then the intricacies of rag-time, but when these came along they would just express London like the rest. Looking back, all had their part: "Comrades"; "The Miner's Dream of Home" ("I sor the old howmstead, the faces I love, — I sor England's valleys and dells"); "Harbour Lights" ("The lights of the Yarbour, the Yarbour lights"); "Hi-tidly-hi-ti"; "Daisy"; "Three pots a shilling"; "It's all right in the summer-time" — most of these still, of course, unborn, but each in its day. Let us suppose it to have been "White Wings" just then — "White Wings" in the streets; and the "Garden of Sleep," say, for "For Ever and For Ever" in the drawing-rooms.

"Night comes; I long for my — "

Yes, it was "dearie," to rhyme with "weary"!

"I spread out my white wings and sail home to thee."

Well?

Well, young Christopher, if only you could, eh? If only you could.

CHAPTER VIII

And yet, his ardour notwithstanding, his heart-hunger, his passion, the turbulence of his feelings generally, he did not meet Cora St. Jemison again for considerably more than two years. All that time he thought about her. She was never, that is, wholly out of his thoughts. Other things occupied him, engrossed him even, but she was there. He did things too; took his degree; and, sent by his grandmother, went (more or less) round the world.

Many things contributed — conspired even — to keep the two apart. In the first instance it was the fog which sent her away — treacherous fog that in some sort might be said to have given her to him! Mr. St. Jemison, it chanced, for the first time for years was spending a winter in England. The fog which engulfed London on that memorable morning dealt summarily with the experiment. There had been other fogs. It wanted but one for the last straw. The servants were set or sent packing; by the end of the week father and daughter, valet and maid, were on their way South; and this time Christopher could not follow them.

The fog, then, first and foremost. After that it was Oxford and his friends. Easter, then, with a couple of visits; then Oxford again, — his nose to the grindstone now, — all sorts of agents and agencies. But who shall say how it was? Neither fate nor accident threw them together. They were never in London at the same moment, or if they were they did not meet. And so to Christopher's travels, when meeting was out of the question. The day before he started on these he went round to Wolf Street again — as so often he had done since the day on which he had seen her. The house was shut up. It seemed always

to be shut up. Upon the one occasion when it was not, he should, it was plain, on any pretext or none have rung the bell and have gone boldly in. So he departed and so the time passed.

He had only to wait. Deep down in his heart he knew — he had always known. He set his face towards the future.

London pulled at him, however, even from the other side of the world. But for shame — and perhaps Harringay, who was with him — he would have cut short his wanderings. Like the miner who dreamt, he too saw the old "Howmstead," and, amongst the "faces" — his mother's, John Hemming's, the indignant Fatima's, his grandmother's, Trimmer's, always one other face beckoning, beckoning. With London he lumped Oxford, Datchet, Boulogne: London in some odd way stood for them all, with whole tracts of green country thrown in, and Cora. Always and always Cora.

His mother met him at Liverpool. She could not help it. She just had to. It was perhaps she who had beckoned, if the truth were known — she and Trimmer, who came with her.

"I declare you've grown, Christopher."

"At my age?" said Christopher, laughing, stooping to kiss her again. He really looked taller and had filled out, but was still on the slim side. These were grounds for declaring that he had grown.

"We must show him to his grandmamma," the privileged Trimmer said when he had kissed her, too.

"I might be six years old," said Christopher — which was exactly what he might have been, what in some ways he was and perhaps always would be!

People looked at Mrs. Hemming as if they envied her her son. She appeared hardly old enough to be his mother, so gently did the happy years deal with her, but (with eyes for no one but him) was so obviously nothing else.

Harringay had landed at Queenstown. The three, ridiculously happy, travelled up to London together. At Eus-

ton, where John Hemming and Fatima (grown Thinima, as Christopher told her) met them, Trimmer resumed, so to speak, her livery. Five contented persons slept in Ebury Street that night.

The next day Christopher went to Wolf Street. The house was dismantled. The board which caught his eye from the end of the street announced that the lease was for sale. He went down to Herrickswood then to report and to show himself to his grandmother, and resigning himself to further waiting, just went on with his life.

It was now that Christopher began to write. It had always been inevitable that sooner or later this must be the sorry fate which would overtake him. What escape was there for him? None, from the day he saw Cora, — little enough before that. The need to express came then. The thing itself was decreed — decreed in the "Come along, Master Christopher" days, established from the moment when he saw what was n't there. It was not for nothing that it had once been said of him that Herrick was listening to the inkpot. He may have been listening, it was certainly now — and through Cora St. Jemison, by reason of something that she had done to him — that he heard it, and heard it distinctly.

He had three hundred a year of his own. He bought a box of "J" nibs, and looked out for rooms in London.

His grandmother was angry. The Herricks had been soldiers when they had not been country gentlemen — or, as she might have added, spendthrifts. No Herrick had ever wielded anything so unpractical as a pen. Robert Herrick had not been distantly connected with the Herricks of Herrickswood, though there had been Herricks at Herrickswood then a couple of hundred years and more. The pen! A thing to play with if you liked. She could appreciate Belles-Lettres. But, for a profession, the symbol of a career . . . ! Thus, to Christopher's imperturbable smiling, she raged or pretended to rage.

"If I were ten years younger, — not if you were, I'd have you notice! — I'd box your ears."

She allowed him to kiss her for that.

His mother, though she helped him to look for rooms, was disappointed. It was John Hemming who, at this juncture, understood him best.

"Let him alone," he said. "The boy'll do. If he never writes a line worth the paper it's written on, he won't have missed what he's here for. He is n't meant to have the sort of career that you've wanted for him — not that I know, dear woman, what it has been all along that you've expected. What was he to have been? Nelson? Napoleon?"

"Not Napoleon," said Christopher's mother.

"Wellington, then? Pitt? Fox? Palmerston?"

Anne did n't see why Christopher should n't have a career.

"I must look that word up in the dictionary," said her husband. "I have an idea that it means a good deal more and a good deal less than you imagine."

That he was n't going to have a Career no one knew better than Christopher. He did not even wish for anything so portentous. If he did n't quite know what he could do, he knew very well indeed what he could not, and if he wrote it was because he had to. There were despairs, for all that. He had something to say, but only in one way could it be said — only, perhaps, in certain words. How to find it and them? He worked hard enough — for Christopher, indolent and ease-loving, he worked hard. There were wrestlings, groanings of the spirit. Often a day's work showed three lines. That did not matter. It was when the three were three lines still at the end of as many days — at the end of as many weeks . . . Had he been mistaken? Had he nothing to say, in fine? He knew he had something.

And then, the way and the words mastered and all going well as he thought, there would uprise of a sudden a grim and impenetrable barrier, the wall unspeakably blind and blank that every writer knows and dreads. On the other

side of this wall things might happen. On the hither side of it all roads were blocked. Useless the roads themselves, useless, that is, all that went before, if this wall were the final goal.

And confronted by it, cowed by it, he had to prove himself. He was disappointing his friends. Even his mother was asking when he was going to Begin. *He* might know that he had begun. With just John Hemming of all the world he might know it — that if he had also finished, he had begun. But there must be something to show, and he would come near to believing that there never would be.

Those were the horrible days.

But there were others — days when his pen had wings. He could see them, almost: two little wings on the shaft, like the wings at Mercury's ankles. Then would his pen fly. Then would the hours fly with it. It was a delight to add another and another page to the fattening bundle. He could hear the inkpot's purr of satisfaction. For it had called to him. He had not been mistaken. Christopher! Christopher! Ridiculous, if you like, but (to Christopher) clear in its hour as the Samuel of that call to which "Lord, here am I" had been the only possible answer, with "Speak, Lord," to follow naturally, "Speak, Lord, for thy servant heareth." Truly there were compensations.

He had rooms in Westminster, in a house now gone the way of so many of Westminster's gracious old houses. It was not unlike the house at Datchet — had the same broad window sills, low ceilings, and leisurely stairs. He was high up, near the stars, but even in this upper region the work of the builder had not been scamped. The walls were panelled. The sloping floors were oak. There were handsome mouldings and cornices, the beauty of which the chippings and mellowings of time had done nothing to impair, but seemed rather to have enhanced. The fireback of the old grate in his sitting-room was a perpetual joy to him. For less than he would have paid for folding-doored abominations, "communicating," in South Belgravia or

Bayswater or South Kensington, he had the top floor of the house known as 3 Cloisters Street, Westminster, within sight of the river and sound of Big Ben, to himself and his ready or reluctant pen. His pen should never have been reluctant in such surroundings.

Mr. Jellicoe, his landlord of Jermyn Street, had helped him to his quarters. As Mr. Herrick was looking for rooms, might he venture to suggest some that he knew of? The house — not, he was afraid, in a fashionable neighbourhood — belonged to a cousin of his wife's; a Mrs. Rommage, a very quiet, respectable person, who, he was sure, would do her best to give Mr. Herrick satisfaction. Mr. Herrick, who, with his mother (the Mrs. Hemming of Mrs. Jellicoe's admiration, who came sometimes to Jermyn Street), had seen South Belgravia, South Kensington, and (protesting) even Bayswater in his search, jumped at, and as soon as possible, into, Mrs. Rommage's top floor, where we find him with his frets and fevers and transports.

So much for his occupation. The act and fact of living were at this period the Thing. He was, still, more interested, whatever he may have supposed, in the life of the streets, the faces he saw, the advertisements on the hoardings, the bill-sticker with his brush and paste-pot, the shape or the sound of an odd name, the passing of a barge under Westminster Bridge, the way the light struck the sails or left them, than in the hours he devoted to work. The call of the inkpot was insistent, nevertheless.

He would go for his wonderful and adventurous walks, would gird himself and walk fast, Richmond his goal, or Hampton Court or Hampstead, or he would explore Islington or Whitechapel or Hoxton. He made many discoveries; found the Britannia Theatre, theretofore a name to him, but endeared to him for its own sake and for something in the sound of that of the lady with whom it was for so long associated; assisted at more than one Festival, — survival of the larger days, — and, near by, lighted upon the last home of the toy theatre of his boyhood.

Or, very carefully dressed, he would be seen in quite other places.

Presently in spite of difficulties, principally difficulties created by his temperament, he was making a small income; and, almost as soon as the little cheques began to come in, something else happened which altered his outlook and set him once more upon his love-chase.

He had been out for one of his walks and came in to find Mrs. Rommage waiting for him, a telegram in each hand.

Mrs. Rommage was an excellent woman, a good cook even, but she had an anxious mind. A telegram disturbed her; two telegrams flustered her.

"You had n't been gone five minutes, sir, when the first come. Not five minutes. And not much more than an hour after, if there did n't come another! I did n't know what to do. If I'd known where to send, but I did n't. However, I kept them separate. This is the first, sir, —" she broke off and looked doubtfully, and then apprehensively, from one to the other. "No, it would be that — no, this . . ." She turned dismayed eyes on him. "If I have n't been and mixed them. If I have n't, after keeping them separate this three hours! What you'll say, sir! And what Mr. Jellicoe would think! Oh, Mr. Herrick, sir. I thought to meself, he'll want to know which come first, sure to, and I would n't let the servants so much as touch them. One come and then the other. And now I don't know which."

Christopher comforted her. Perhaps it would say inside, he said, smiling.

She refused to be comforted. It did say inside. But she shook her head, blaming herself. Like Mr. Jellicoe with the ancient Red Book, she seemed to think the house compromised.

"Not any the less repre'ensible upon my part, sir."

Blaming herself, and anxious but not inquisitive, she withdrew.

The telegrams, sorted out into their proper order, proved to be a summons to Herrickswood from his grandmother,

brooking, it seemed, no delay; and a whip. She would know, if he pleased, whether her message had reached him, whether he was starting at once, and if not, why not. She was not ill, she was thoughtful enough to inform him, but the matter was urgent.

The whimsical note was present, but under it Christopher thought he could detect that which was not whimsical. He telegraphed, packed a bag, and caught the next train.

CHAPTER IX

His grandmother herself met him at the station. The footman — but neither wooden Albert nor the Ventriloquist now! — informed him, to his surprise, that she was in the carriage, and Christopher hurried out to her.

"Your Uncle Stephen," she said when they had greeted each other; adding, "Why on earth don't you get your telegrams?" in impatient parenthesis. "Your Uncle Stephen. Not that I could have telegraphed it. And not that I might n't either, since by this time every one probably knows. Have they got your luggage? Blockheads. How stupid they are. There's Charles. Tell him to hurry, then. That's right. Get in now."

He took his place beside her.

"You're too late, I may tell you, for what I wanted you for. I wanted protection. Some one with me of my own — you, Christopher. Your mother would have done, oddly enough. But she's timid. I could n't have asked it of her. And you don't get your telegrams. What's the good of you?"

"What's the matter, Grandmother Herrick?"

He was still waiting to be told.

"Drink was the matter — blazing, raving, fighting drink. Now nothing's the matter. Your Uncle Stephen's dead, Christopher, and his wretched old mother is glad."

But she was crying. Christopher's hand went out to hers. It is dreadful at all times to see the old cry; doubly dreadful to see an old person cry whom few, in all her long life, had ever seen to cry.

"Granny," Christopher said, "Granny."

He had never called her that before. Granny was for his gentler grandmother — the Granny Oxeter of a thou-

sand tendernesses. It was thenceforward for this grandmother too.

"He was such a pretty boy," the old woman was saying. "People used to turn in the street. Make much of him. He had yellow curls. I'm talking of half a lifetime ago. I suppose we spoilt him — his father as much as I. His father adored him. I remember one time when he was ill . . . Well, he did n't die then. I've wished sometimes that he had. He was prettier still at the age when it's dangerous for a boy to be pretty. And, good Lord, when he was nineteen or twenty! I don't wonder they lost their heads about him. I would n't have minded that if he could have kept his own. But he could n't. At Oxford. Goodness! He was sent down. His father minded that more than I did. I'm not squeamish. I even understood, and understand, in a way. They would n't let him alone. His own class then. The St. Jemison woman, — though I ought n't to speak of her to you, I suppose, — and that sort. I've taken their part, before this — the St. Jemison's — often. Now I think I hate her more than any of them for the mischief she did. Light, light, light, as I told your mother — light, with one of those good hearts and no harm in her — rotten! Your mother saved John Hemming from her, Christopher, but there was no one to save Stephen. So he went on. It was debts and women, and women and debts, till it was women and debts and drink; and drink 's the worst of that three with a nature like Stephen's. For months at a time I have n't known where he was — except to be sure that, wherever he was, he was in the gutter. Twice he was in jail. I would have taken him back at any minute — he knew that. I speak of taking him back as if he was a boy. But that was it. He was always a boy to me. It's as a boy I see him still."

She broke off. Christopher said nothing, knowing well that in letting herself go she was getting some of the relief she needed so grievously. The brougham rolled smoothly along the sleek country roads.

"I loved him till he broke my heart," she said presently, more now to herself than to him. "And after that too," she added.

"Tell me how you're getting on," she said, a few moments later.

He told her something of what he was doing.

"But you don't get your telegrams," she said.

They turned in at the lodge gates.

"After all, you could only have been here two or three hours sooner. It was that I wanted you. My first weakness, I believe, in what has been a fairly self-reliant life."

Weakness! It was others in the house who told him what she had been through, what all had been through, in a three days' nightmare. She had been in danger of her life at the hands of a madman, for two of them. There had been horrors — times when it had been necessary to hold the patient down in the bed. Christopher heard with dismay and admiration. Why had he not been sent for before? Mrs. Herrick would allow neither the doctor nor the servants to send for any one. The worst was over when she had sent the first telegram. It was only then that the nerves, theretofore of iron, seemed to have had her at their mercy.

Difficult to realise the horrors and the tragedy of the last few hours. The house looked the same as ever. In his grandmother's sitting-room the black velvet glove hung over the coal-box, and a fire burned brightly at the grate. Difficult even to realise that this was not the same black velvet glove that had hung there when he was a boy! Many velvet gloves must have succeeded the one which he remembered. The book of the Views of the Rhine was on the table where it had always stood. Nothing seemed changed.

But death was in the house — the strange feeling, silences, tiptoeings. The servants were awed. They moved about in couples with whisperings. In the unusual si-

lence were unusual sounds. The green baize doors shut off successions of visitors to the housekeeper's room — to the servants' quarters generally. Ollenshaw could have told of head-shakings and talkifications. One would be admitted or another. You might hear the quiet opening or shutting of doors behind doors, the furtive commotions of death. There were endless tea-drinkings. Every one needed support. Every one had something to say. Every one knew. As Christopher's grandmother had said, she might have telegraphed! No one within twenty miles but knew what Stephen Herrick had died of, and how he had died.

Outside the house the stories were flying. He had tried to strangle the nurses or his mother. Some said the nurses, some said his mother. He had bitten through his own gold watch in his paroxysms. He had knocked out the teeth of one of the grooms who had been fetched in from the stables to hold him. You could n't hold him. He had been bound with ropes and had burst them like Samson. That sort of thing. As for what he had seen! Bottle imps, pink rats, devils. It was Save him from them. Keep them off the counterpane. Snakes too. The old fly-blown, thumb-marked quota of snakes. Green, I suppose, or pink perhaps, like the rats. They did not even let him off those. He was spared nothing, indeed, in the winged stories. All that imagination could imagine, or invention invent, was credited to the horrors of an end horrible enough in all conscience. Gibberings, screamings, cursings, tears, he was given all these, with writhings and inarticulate furies. And to drink they gave him brandy and brandy and again brandy, to inflame him and their own imaginations. His cunningnesses and his clevernesses and his machinations! Drink could not be kept from him. If the nurses so much as turned their backs . . . ! Moreover, he produced bottles miraculously from under the bedclothes.

So the stories flew outside the house. The delirium of a Coupeau, with borrowings from the more distressing symptoms of hydrophobia!

Poor Stephen! He at least had done with it all. Poor mother of Stephen, who had not, and who knew — not indeed that she cared — how tongues wagged and would wag.

She sat at dinner as usual; she and Christopher opposite to each other at a little table in the big dining-room. But things were not quite as usual. There were unaccustomed pauses and hitches. The kitchen or the pantry was clearly demoralised. Mrs. Herrick said nothing, but grunted her displeasure. The butler and his paralysed satellites looked unspeakable concern and apology. It was the kitchen, clearly.

After dinner Christopher did not stop to smoke, but followed his grandmother to her sitting-room. She did not talk of Stephen now, or, rather, she did not talk of him directly; but her mind, he knew, was occupied with her dead son. She talked mostly to Christopher of his mother, who, he knew also, had always had a pitying place in her heart for the ne'er-do-well.

"I made the marriage between her and your stepfather," she said — irrelevantly, it might have appeared to Christopher. "She would never have married him but for me."

Christopher may have thought that he made that marriage.

"Never, if I had n't talked to her. She was always timid. She had n't got over your father's death, either. In one sense, I know, she never will, but, in another, deaths are what the living have to get over — if they are to go on being the living, that is. Your stepfather has to thank me for his escape."

It was not quite true. Mrs. St. Jemison had failed John Hemming before John Hemming sought out Christopher's mother. Christopher did not know all the facts, but if he had known them would not have dreamt of setting the speaker right. He was astray for a moment or two, and then saw the drift of the old woman's thoughts. She was saying again that there had been no one to save Stephen.

At ten o'clock his grandmother rose.

"You'll find a fire in the library," she said. "Ask for what you want. There's nothing to be done to-night. The announcement went to the papers this morning. To-morrow there'll be letters to write, people to see, things to settle, and you'll help me."

Christopher lit a second candle.

"Don't think you've got to," she said. "Young people hate death. It's natural. Yes, I'm going in to see him, to say good-night to him."

"I want to come with you, if you'll let me."

"Well, there's nothing dreadful," she said, — "nothing dreadful — though he died dreadfully," she added.

She led the way to the room which Christopher knew so well. It was always his mother's room at Herrickswood. Some of her associations with it were his from the days of the memorable visit. He had heard the Waits from the dressing-room adjoining. The Waits were a dim memory to him now, but still a memory.

"It used to be his," she said, "in the old days. He liked big rooms. Your father was content with something smaller. Stephen loved his ease."

There was nothing about it to suggest death — none of death's trappings. Nothing even to tell of what had gone before death. All that could suggest illness had been cleared away. Wonderful rooms that keep their secrets! Wonderful, and beautiful, and horrible, the secrets of the old rooms, the secrets of the old houses! Christopher, with a momentary shudder, remembered a night when he had seemed to know everything that could be happening in London; a night made up of "open moments." What such open moments would not have revealed here!

His grandmother saw him shudder.

"Nothing dreadful," she said again, and smiled.

"I know," Christopher said.

She drew down the sheet which outlined the figure in the bed.

No, there was nothing dreadful. The eyes which, a few hours back, red-rimmed, had blazed and stared and started, closed now, were as the eyes of one very gently sleeping; and the features, distressed and distorted so lately, were calm. Nothing dreadful. Something very tender in the aspect of the resting figure, much of beauty in the worn face.

The old woman and the young man, their candles held high, stood beside the bed.

"It was rest he wanted — rest from himself. He was for ever driven, hunted. He gave himself no peace. It was as if something insatiable was inside him. They talk of the worm that never dies and the fire that can't be quenched. Ask such as my unhappy son there, which side of the grave those are found. Ask any one who lives the life of the flesh. He was tormented from within. They all are. It's the smoke of that sort of torment that goes up. God pity us all, Christopher. God pity us all."

She was n't crying now. If any one was crying it was Christopher — for some one he had never known. He heard himself saying, "Amen to that," rather huskily. It was not the sort of thing he would have said, or could have said, at any other time, but he was quite sincere as he said it.

"You must n't think I'm unhappy about him now. Somehow, sometime or other, it will be all right, even for Stephen. I don't know how, but I do know that. I'm not thinking of him as knocking at the door of any heaven. What would he do in such a place — he with the smell of this world on him? It's what he must know now that consoles me — if I can speak of consolation: the rottenness at the core of everything that he cared for. Could I suppose he had n't learned that? I make no excuses for him. We create ourselves, I've no doubt in my own mind about that. We blame the Almighty and every one else, but we are our own makers as surely as night follows day. We did n't ask to be born? I'm convinced that we did —

clamoured to take shape, took shape maybe by force. The old know. You'll know, Christopher, when you're as old as I am."

She stooped and kissed the dead face.

Christopher turned away. When he looked back she was drawing up the sheet to its place.

"There, we'll leave him to his sleeping. It was sleep that he needed. He'll sleep to-night without dreams."

Christopher went down to the library, from the depths of which — or was it from the depths of the great drawing-room of ceremony? — the footman Ventriloquist had once called up strange voices. A friendly room. The walls were lined with books which no one read, but the mellow brown of old bindings, which was long since the mellow colour of the room itself, gave him welcome. A leather screen sheltered an armchair near the fire from unlikely draughts, and invited him to the hearth. The orrery standing near one of the heavily curtained windows, the pair of globes near another, the wheeled ladder, the busts (Julius Cæsar, Nero, and Doctor Johnson), all greeted him. He was young, and the young revolt, as Mrs. Herrick had said, from thoughts of death. Under the spell of the cheerful room he recovered from the gloom which had been creeping over him.

Soothed by cheerful influences, lulled, "comforted" in every material sense, — comforted as "with apples," — he read for an hour, put out the lamps, and went upstairs. He was pleasantly sleepy now.

Passing the death-chamber, however, on his way to his room, he thought he heard a sound, and turned back. He listened for a moment or two, and then, opening the door very gently, he looked in.

A candle stood upon a table, and by the dim light of it he saw the figure of his grandmother kneeling by the bed. He withdrew himself at once, closing the door as noiselessly as he had opened it. But at Christ's "Could ye

not watch with me one hour?" the disciples in Gethsemane may have felt as he felt at that moment. He went on to his room, which was near by, and did not begin to undress till a soft sound or two in the silent house told him at length that the dauntless but stricken old woman had gone to hers. He lay awake then, thinking of his grandmother and of the motionless form under the sheet. But in the morning he woke thinking of Cora, who — though he must not think it yet — was nearer to him, most surely nearer to him now, than she had been.

CHAPTER X

His grandmother sent for him. The funeral was over. The few relations there were to gather had gathered and were gone. His stepfather, who, though he was not a relation, had attended the funeral, was gone also. There remained only his mother, who was going to stay on for a few days at Herrickswood, and himself, who was going back at the end of the week to London and his work.

"His work!" his grandmother said.

He could always laugh at himself happily, and he laughed then.

His grandmother observed, he hoped, that he did not say Works.

"You'll think of your work as your Works before you've done, for all that, I daresay," she said, and appealed to the ceiling. "His work! Pens, ink, and paper! Well, well. We shall see, I suppose, what you can do. Meanwhile I sent for you to tell you what I suppose you know. Your uncle's death will make a considerable difference to you."

"Yes, grandmother?"

"Yes, Christopher. I had thought a dozen times of making you my heir in his lifetime — passing him over, I mean. I've an idea that it was thought that I had — not by you, I know, or your mother. Ollenshaw's an old servant and a good, faithful soul, but she talks, and it's known that I can do as I like. They've seen my provocation, and seen too what was plain enough for every one to see: that I'm fond of you, for all your dreamings and poesies and artistries —"

("Don't be so hard on me, Grandmother Herrick"; interpolation by Christopher. "Hang it all, I'm not as bad as that!"

"Every bit, and be damned to you, my dear"; counter-interpolation by Christopher's grandmother.)

"— Your differentnesses from all that I've been accustomed to. You *are* different, — I see it, if I don't understand it, — of the stuff that dreamers are made of. But you're a healthy young animal, too, somehow, and you're a Herrick to look at, upstanding and clean-limbed and well-grown and good enough to see, and I've loved you from the day you showed me you were n't afraid of me."

"W'ff," said Christopher.

He, if his grandmother was not, was a little out of breath. He stood before her smiling, his colour heightened. He put the backs of his hands to his hot cheeks, and waited for her to proceed or to finish.

She looked at him, well pleased. There was nothing self-conscious in his action or bearing or attitude. He was embarrassed — she wished to embarrass him! — but was standing what was almost a test. He did not flinch under her onslaught.

"Men ought to be fighters," she said; "doers, not dreamers."

Christopher thought men might do something with dreams. He did not say so. He just waited.

"You are 'different,'" she said, insisting as an inquisitor might insist. "Are n't you? Answer me."

"I've never written a line of poetry in my life," he said. "But things *are* wonderful. Wonderful, if you see them."

"And you can see them — think you can, anyway?"

"They are wonderful," he said, — "almost everything is."

She had to leave it at that; left teasing him, and went back to what she had been saying.

"Where was I? Oh, yes. Thought of passing him over. Goodness knows he provoked me. But somehow I never did. Probably because he dared to provoke me. So, though you were n't before, you're next now for Herrickswood."

Christopher's heart, with Cora in it, gave a jump. She

was nearer. He had "known," of course, in a sense, but this putting into words seemed to crystallise into the solidity of fact what had been at most a conjecture, and one which he could hardly allow himself to form. He did not want Herrickswood, did not covet it or its rent-roll, or actually anything at all that he had not, but he could not hear what his grandmother had just told him without experiencing excitement. The colour came more deeply into his face.

He would find Cora now, he knew — was to find her. Perhaps he would not even have to seek her. He would get news of her by miracle, if no other way.

"Thank you, Grandmother."

"Wait till I'm dead to do that."

Christopher hoped she would have to wait for her thanks a long time.

"I believe you there," she said, "or I should n't have told you."

She kissed him, and he left her. Her lawyers, who were waiting for her, spent the rest of the day with her. Two days later, when the will which was drafted then had duly been drawn up and signed, she spoke of the matter again. This time it was to Christopher's mother.

"I don't want any mystery about it. I shall tell people. I don't want them talking and wondering, gauging chances, naming this one and that, and making surmises. I don't want distant relations and people who 've no claim upon me, and on whom I've no claim, paying court to me. I choose it to be known, Anne, that I've made Christopher my heir. This is his home now, as often as he likes to come to it. The servants will take orders from him when he 's here, as from a son of the house. He can have his own rooms, and come and go as he likes. The oftener it is Come the better I shall be pleased. When it 's Go, — though I shall be wise enough, I hope, not to say so, — I shall always be sorry."

"You're too good to him," said Anne, but she did not think so really.

She was only taking the change in her son's prospects sensibly — with a sigh, all the same, for the days when her son had been dependent on her. Trimmer may have heard that sigh of hers sometimes; no one else.

"Not so much to him, when all's said, as to myself," said Christopher's grandmother. "He's a good boy, or, if he is n't, he's a mighty attractive one. Do you suppose I should have forgiven any one else his trade? He's John o' dreams, when I meant him for a soldier. An 'artist,' — don't they call it? — when he was to have been a man. Not that he is n't that too. He's strong enough, and muscular enough, I grant you. Male enough, I allow. A male without blemish, I've no doubt you think him. But writers, 'artists,' seers! I had my misgivings, I remember, when he was a boy. You sat there and crocheted where you're sitting now with your knitting. And I warned you."

Anne pulled gently at her wool; unwound a yard or two to go on with from the ball which lay at her feet. She was knitting stockings for Christopher's stepfather — or for Christopher; she was not quite sure which. Their legs were about the same length.

"He seems to be getting on," she said. "They're taking his things. They write to him for them. Some one told John the other day that his work is well thought of. I forget who, but some one who knows about these things. John thinks he'll do something. *He* says he's clever."

"Of course he's clever," snapped Christopher's grandmother. "Is n't that what's the matter with him? Is n't that what I'm deploring?"

She whipped up an argument, set poor Anne defending her son; finished by laughing at her.

"Do you think I'm not proud of him, Anne Hemming? Do you think I'm not as proud of him as you are this minute?"

She got up and went over to a writing-table, where she opened a drawer.

"Come here."

Anne put down her work and went over to her, wondering what she should see.

Half a dozen magazines lay before her. Anne knew them well enough. Christopher's name figured in the table of the contents of each of them.

"Do you think I'm not watching? I daresay I have n't all that he's written. These are what I've managed to get hold of. I've read them, too, these contributions of his, though I'm not a reader, as I need n't tell you. I don't understand all of them, and I don't suppose I'm much of a judge if I did; but I'll say this: even I can see that the boy's doing what he had to do. I've been rallying him on not being like the menkind I'm used to — on being what I call 'different.' He is different. Very well, then, do you suppose, in my heart, I'd have him different from different?"

Anne said nothing for a moment. Her eyes were shining. She, like Christopher before her, felt a little out of breath.

"You're — you're —" she began, and got no further.

"A wicked old woman to have made game of you? You're so easy to make game of, the pair of you. There, there won't be so very much for him to come into (the Herrick men — not his father, of course — but the rest of the crew, the precious stamp *I've* been accustomed to, saw to that!); still, his future, such as it is, is assured him, and he can follow a poor trade with a light heart. There's a book on the stocks, I understand. My grandson, whom only yesterday, as it appears to me, I saw sucking his thumb, — whom I gave pennies to for holding his tongue, if he could, for five minutes! A book, if you please. A novel, I suppose. We'll see what he makes of it."

"The dearest wicked old woman," said Christopher's mother.

He did n't make much of it; was not ready for it, perhaps; or had set himself more than he could achieve. The

time came when the precious book was finished. The time came, even, when, after many disappointments, the precious volume found a publisher. But there, to all intents and purposes, the matter ended. The blank walls he had come up against had been too much for him? He had never razed them at all? Never seen over them, or made gaps in them large enough to see through to the other side? Who shall say? The thing halted; was like a billiard ball moving in the right direction, but without "legs" enough to fulfil the player's intention. Yet the book was n't bad — not a book anyway to be ashamed of. A review or two, taking the trouble to see what the author aimed at, praised it discriminatingly. The rest, praising faintly, damned it effectually. It just fell flat; may have deserved to fall flat. And so in this, the first round, Christopher, upon whom in other ways fortune was smiling so pleasantly, saw himself knocked out rather badly.

CHAPTER XI

It was late autumn when his uncle died; winter when his book came out and died, too; spring when one morning, in Sloane Street, Christopher came face to face with Cora St. Jemison.

It might have been expected that in the two years in which he had not seen her, her hold upon him, whatever its nature, would have slackened. He had only seen her three times, all told; had exchanged words with her but upon one of them; could hardly be said to know her; it needed but the sight of her coming towards him in her white dress to set him trembling.

The miracle of the foggy morning was repeated. She was some thirty yards from him, when, under his startled eyes, she turned, as before, from an unknown figure — just a girl at whom he chanced to be looking (Girl in a Street now for Girl in a Room) — into the girl of all girls in the world, the white lady of his dreams waking and sleeping. He held his breath as they approached each other. Would she see him? Would she remember him? Would she know him?

She saw him. His concentration alone would have ensured that, and currents must have been playing upon her from his eyes as from a battery. Impossible, if you were even comparatively sensitive to influences, to have passed anything so "electric" as was Christopher at that moment, without becoming aware of its presence and activity. Oh, yes, she saw him. Did she remember? He believed she remembered. Was she going to recognise him?

He could not let her escape him.

He stopped her.

"You don't remember me," he said; wondering vaguely

what he should say next, how if she did not he should justify his action. His thoughts, jumping the dinner-party, went back to Victoria Station. It was there rather than in Mayfair that they had really met.

She shook her head.

"Ah, you don't!" he said.

"On the contrary, I do. You took me down to dinner at Mrs. Constaple's. Some one — some one else — was to have taken me down. I remember quite well, you see. Your name's Herrick, and you're not a descendant of the poet."

"Did I tell you all that?"

"Not till I asked you. It was my name you wanted to know."

"That's more than two years ago. I could hardly have hoped you'd remember."

She laughed.

"Oh, I don't know," she said. "I remember things that happened longer ago than that."

He looked at her slowly.

"I wonder if you do," he said.

He could not tell from her face. What was in his mind, what he wondered whether hers held also, brought him now to a halt. There was a moment when it seemed as if he would find nothing more to say. If neither spoke, they would have to separate, go their several ways; and London would swallow her up.

"I've so often wondered about you," he said, rather desperately. "Wondered where you were, I mean," — he seemed under the dominion of a word! — "and whether I should ever see you again."

It was she now who looked at him questioningly. But she did not look surprised as she might have looked, nor as if she resented what might — if it had been differently said — have seemed an impertinence. It was not an impertinence.

She was alone. The day had come when girls were be-

ginning to be allowed to go about alone in the morning; yet, looking at her, Christopher felt that her beauty was of a quality which must subject it and her to attention of a kind not wholly desirable. She should, he felt, have had the protection of some sort of companionship. Even as she talked to him he saw with a pang of jealousy that glances were thrown at her — to her, he could almost have thought. What was it about her? Something in the wonderful whiteness of her skin? In the redness of her lips? Something in the shape of the eyelids, which were so often lowered?

His memory had played him no tricks. She was more beautiful, he saw, — a sharp stab at his heart, — than he had thought her. Her beauty troubled him.

"We were living in London when I met you," she said. "We had a house then. My father parted with it. I have n't been in London for some time. I don't suppose I've spent a month in London in the last couple of years."

"You've been abroad?"

"We're generally abroad somewhere. We've spent the last two winters in Sicily. We have a villa near Palermo."

He could not ask her questions. Again a halt threatened.

"You did n't mind my speaking to you?"

"Why should I mind?" She looked at him frankly. "I've even been hearing your name lately — quite often just lately."

He was afraid she was going to speak of his book.

"I'm staying with Mrs. Constaple. She's by way of taking me out, as my father can't be bothered to go to things, and — and there's nobody else. Mrs. Constaple's a friend of Mrs. Herrick, and Mrs. Herrick's your grandmother, is n't she?"

Christopher's face brightened.

"Of course," he said, "of course. Mrs. Constaple knows my grandmother. It was through her — my grandmother, I mean — that I came to be asked to that dinner-party."

"I believe we used to know Mrs. Herrick, too, once upon a time. We've lost touch with most people."

"She would remember," said Christopher.

He did not hear what was said in answer to that. A railway van clattering by at the moment drowned the words. "She might not care to," or "might not want to," was what he believed she said. He fancied also that it was not wholly the noise of the van which prevented his hearing. She spoke, he thought, under her breath.

"My grandmother never forgets her friends," he heard himself saying.

"Oh, I was a child," she said, smiling. "It's years ago — an infant."

At the word "child" something stirred in Christopher's mind. He had a momentary recollection of a strange evening in which his mother and his other grandmother had part, his aunts also, Laura and Catherine, the dead soldier, Trimmer in her best dress and behaving oddly. Child. Something connected with the word. He repeated it to himself. Child. A child. The child. That was nearer. The Child, Habits of . . .? Something like that. Customs of? Ridiculous. Yet something of, surely. Custody of! That was it. Out of the dimness the whole sentence came back to him.

"If he dies (Mr. St. Jemison), I suppose she (Mrs. St. J.) will have the Custody of the Child."

Christopher was back with the moment when he had first heard of Cora's existence.

So Mr. St. Jemison, who had been ill just then, had not died, — Christopher had wondered and forgotten to wonder about that, — and had kept the Custody of his daughter.

Some one else looked at the girl, who appeared not to see. Christopher raged inwardly. A thought which suddenly disturbed him was that just thus might he himself have been supposed to look at her, on the day when the long look, which had passed between them, had seemed to him to end his search for ever.

He could not keep her standing on the pavement any longer.

"May I walk with you to the end of the street?" he said.

He thought she hesitated.

"I almost must," he said.

She glanced at a clock which she could see from where she was, before, with an inclination of her eyelids rather than her head, she assented. They began to walk up the street. There was not far to go. At the top of it he knew he must leave her.

"Please," he said, and she turned to him. Her smile met his and she slackened her pace.

"You said you remembered things just now — things that happened longer ago than two years."

"We all do, surely."

"You were just speaking generally, then? You had nothing in mind — no particular incident."

"What sort of incident?"

"Tell me," he said, "had you ever seen me before? Before I met you at Mrs. Constaple's, I mean."

His eyes were on his glove, which he was buttoning (and unbuttoning too), as he spoke. He looked from it to the other side of the road — not at her. It was as if he wanted her to have a clear field. There was what seemed like a long pause.

"Yes," she said. Her voice was quite steady. "I had seen you before."

"Where?"

He had lived too long with an idea to see the strangeness, even the possible unfairness, of what he asked. So much seemed (to him at least) to depend upon her answers. Again he did not look at her as he put his question. Again there was a long pause — measured by the tumult of emotions it was able to contain for him. And again she answered him steadily.

"I saw you at Victoria Station. I passed near you and you looked at me. I was with my father. You were talking

to a little girl. There was a lady in the carriage near you. You did n't speak, but you seemed to say something to me as I passed you."

Christopher swallowed dryly.

"What did I say? No, I did n't speak. What did I appear to say?"

But she shook her head.

"I can't tell you. You see you did n't say anything. How could you have said anything? You did n't know me. Yet you did seem to — to ask something. Could you have asked me who I was? For it seemed to me — it was all very strange — that some sort of answer was called out of me. It was as if you did know me, and recognised me, and were asking me if you were n't right in thinking so."

Christopher turned round and faced her.

"That's just what was happening. I thought, and I think that I did recognise you."

It was she now who faced him.

"But you'd never seen me before," she said.

He was silent.

"But had you?" she asked him.

He looked at her without speaking.

"Had you?" she persisted. And he had to answer of course that he had not.

"Then . . . ?" Her gesture completed her question.

They had reached the top of the street. There was a little crowd about the spot where the omnibuses stop. People jostling each other jostled them, as one of these turned the corner of Knightsbridge. Before it had pulled up a cluster of human beings was hanging on to the tail of it, like a dropping cluster of swarming bees. A hurrying woman with children pulling at skirts reminded Christopher of the pulled and pulling women, mothers, aunts, guardians, at the Crystal Palace.

"I can't tell you here," he said. "When can I see you again? You'll let me see you again. I — I must see you again."

It was a hazardous word to use, as hazardous nearly as the "almost must" of a few minutes before. But she had not shown any surprise at that, and she showed none now. It was surely for his wanton torment that therefore the thought must needs come to him that she was used to being spoken to in this way, accustomed to hearing people like himself say that they must see her again, and expected no less. He could have wished the word unsaid. He was jealous of he knew not whom — of every one who saw her, he supposed.

"Mrs. Constaple is at home on Sundays," she said. "She'll be very glad to see you. Will you come next Sunday?"

He was ashamed of himself in a moment, and relieved unspeakably also. What, then, did he want? Let him be reasonable!

"Next Sunday," he said; and she repeated "Next Sunday," as she held out her hand.

They separated. He watched her till he lost her in the crowd. An impression that he carried away was that she hurried a little as if to make up for lost time, and that she wanted the crowd to engulf her.

Happy and unhappy, unhappy and happy: just as before. Happy to have seen her; unhappy for something that the sight of her did to him. Was it always to be so?

He crossed Knightsbridge and turned into the park at Albert Gate. He made, not for the Row, where, young as the season was, people were walking and sitting watching the riders, but, instead, for the paths skirting the Serpentine. He wanted to collect himself, steady his nerves, give his pulses time to get back to their normal beat. His temples were throbbing.

A few people were walking beside the water. An elderly woman of battered appearance was making her toilet on one of the seats. She had taken off her bonnet and was

combing her wisps of grey hair, singing to herself in a thin, cracked voice as she did so. Children with nurses in attendance were sailing their boats, and children without were wetting their feet. There was the sound of the barking of many dogs.

Christopher, walking rapidly, saw and heard without consciousness of seeing or hearing. He passed the space marked off for the morning and evening bathers, and threw a thought without knowing that he did so to those intrepid ones for whom the ice was broken in the winter. One of a group of little boys standing round a glass jam-pot, in which little fish were swimming, or already floating, asked him the time, only to be met with an uncomprehending stare. He had gone on half a dozen yards when he realised that some one had spoken to him.

"Yes?" he said.

"Please will you tell me the right time."

"Oh. I don't know it," he said, speaking like one who has been roused out of sleep and is even yet half asleep. But he did know it, or had only to look at his watch to know it. He drew his watch from his pocket almost as he spoke.

"Said 'e did n't know, and 'im with a gold watch and chain! Wool-gatherin'. Know what 'e is? 'E 's a wool-gatherer."

Inwardly he was widely awake. He was living again through the incident of the recent meeting, thinking of what had been said and what had not been said; marvelling, now, that he had found it possible to say so much. Whatever the outcome of the chance encounter — if it was chance, if chance could be supposed to have anything to do with a thing which seemed as if it must have been ordained since the beginning of time! — their knowledge of each other had that day made notable strides. Neither had been reticent. Admission had been made for admission. Impossible that she should not have perceived what lay behind

his questions. His heart leapt. That she should have remembered! Nay, that she should have guessed at his unspoken "Is it you?" and even have supposed herself in some sort to be making answer to it — to whatever it was that he was asking her! Here was the marvel of all, here the real miracle. Here also was proof, surely, if proof were needed, that in his wildest dreaming he had never been astray for a moment. He would know his own when he should find it, and in turn be known of it. That had been the sense and the substance of all his dreams; and it was true. He was justified now of his dreaming.

He had passed under the bridge and had paused at the more secluded end of the lake, where the barking of dogs and the voices of the children reached him but faintly. It was here that he came to himself. The first thing that he perceived was that the sun, shining on the water before him, had turned it from ornamental water in a London park into a thing of enchantment. The second, that the smell of spring was in the air, sweetening it, softening it, giving it intoxicating properties for the senses of the lover. The third, that leaves were unfolding, buds opening, birds singing their spring song from every tree and shrub. Christopher, always able to see lovers, in a moment saw lovers. Saw them, as at Greenwich, under the trees, when he turned from the water and made for the broad avenues towards Kensington Palace; saw them walk close on the paths, or wander side by side upon the grass. Once more — as on each indeed of the times that he had seen her — the white girl had done something to his eyes. He had never, he thought, seen the Broad Walk look quite as it looked to-day; nor the shadows, the wide stretches of green, the blue veiled distances. No wonder that on so golden a day the glades should be peopled with lovers. Again he thought of Watteau, Lancret, Fragonard, the painters of lovers and settings for lovers.

But he wished that he had not seen the looks thrown upon her by passers-by, and that he could rid himself of the

impression that, hurrying, as he believed she had hurried, to make up for lost time, she had welcomed the crowd, which, like a cloud, had received her out of his sight — had wished it so to receive and to hide her.

CHAPTER XII

Now began the fever in earnest. Christopher, unable to work and unable to play, strained towards Sunday as flowers in a dark place towards the light. He had not much hope that the day would bring him any real satisfaction. Mrs. Constaple's rooms would be full, he supposed, and any opportunity for talk with her guest — such intimate talk at least as he desired — would have to be snatched from circumstances which could not, in the nature of things, be expected to offer them freely. But on Sunday he would see her, be in the same room with her, hear her voice. How to bridge over the gulf from then to Sunday!

He paced the uneven floors of his rooms, while his manuscript paper lay untouched upon his table, and his ink-bottle was silent because there was no one to hear still small voices. The wings had dropped from his pen. Pens, ink, paper — they were all now the poor things that his grandmother at Herrickswood thought them! They did not matter any more. Nothing mattered but the consuming need that possessed him.

Yet there were times when he took what he was neglecting into his confidence, as there were times when he took the very walls into his confidence, too, the deep window sills, the old mouldings, the fire-back even, the friendly hearth.

"Wait," he might have been saying to his deserted writing table; "wait. I shall come back to you. I shall come back to you with more use for you, for all this. I've failed you. It's I who am failing you, not you me, I know that; but I shall come back to you."

Yes, his eyes falling on his poor book, his first-born and still-born, it was he who had failed them. He had come

by them too easily; had not been ready for them; had done and was doing them grave injustice. But (again) let them wait and they would see; would see what this neglect of them would have done for them; what *she* — the disturber of his peace of mind — would be found to have done for them. One of these days. One of these fine days . . .

Not in words, of course, any of this: just Christopher, a long, broad-shouldered figure in a tweed suit, his hands in his pockets and his throat rather bare, looking at things on a table at which he ought to have been sitting.

To the walls and the mouldings and the deep window sills the words he did not say were quite different. He asked them how he was to bear it. (This, while he was still "happy.") How was he to bear her beauty, and what her beauty did to him?

"You," to the walls and the mouldings, — "you, old as you are, never saw any one like her. Oh, you've seen in your day. I know that. But you have n't seen her."

He would wake in the night to stretch out his arms to her. "Cora, come to me. Come to me now." And he would sit up in the darkness to listen for an answer. "Cora, can't you hear me? Can't you? I should hear you if you called. If you called me from the other side of the world, I should hear you. Try me. Call me. Say my name. Say it ever so low. I shall hear it."

But he did not hear it. He heard instead the stealthy movements, or the frank scamperings of mice behind the wainscot; their gnawings; their occasional squeakings. There was a "singing" mouse amongst them, which sometimes would be there, sometimes not. He had often heard it in his rooms, or in other parts of the house; under floors, behind woodwork or plaster. As a good sleeper, — asleep from the moment, almost literally, that his head touched the pillow to that when he was called in the morning, — he had seldom heard its chirpings and twitterings in the night itself; but, in the nights that divided him from the first day of the next week, he grew familiar with the

curious little sound, and would listen for it. It took its place, together with noises from the street and the river, the booming of Big Ben at intervals, and the striking of other clocks near and far, in the patchwork of night-sounds which were the accompaniment to his silent callings.

Or he would get up, and, slipping on a coat or a dressing-gown, go into the next room to one of the windows and look out and breathe deeply. He would kneel on the wide sill and rest his arms on the frame of the window, the upper half of which was open, and rest his chin on his wrists, and so stay motionless. Or he would open the lower half, and, drawing his feet under him, coil himself up on the sill, and deliver himself so to the soothing influences of the night and the airs of the night.

He could see the river. Sometimes a barge would go by even in the darkness — a moving patch of blackness with a light; or river police would be abroad upon some errand. Unexpected lights would shake out their long ribands in the water. The ribands from permanent lights were steadier — tongues licking deeply into the shining obscurity. If dawn had come when he looked out, he would see the gulls . . .

It was a Monday when he had met Cora St. Jemison in Sloane Street. He had six nights and five days to get through before the day came which should give him sight of her and speech with her again. He might, of course, see her before that. What more likely, now that he knew her to be in London? He did, indeed, catch a glimpse of her, one afternoon, driving with her hostess, and that day — Thursday — was the red-letter day of those that made up the rest of that week. The carriage passed him in Bond Street; just at the corner of Bruton Street. Her face was turned from him and towards Mrs. Constaple, who was talking. His heart stood still for a moment. But she did not see him. It was a pain, and a relief to him also,

that she did not see him. He stood still, like his heart, and looked after the carriage.

But this was the only time that he saw her, and, for something that he could not have explained, he rather avoided than frequented the parts of the town in which he might have expected to come across her. Such chance glimpses of her took too much out of him? He could hardly say that, since he held that particular Thursday (and the corner of Bruton Street!) hallowed. Discounted the pleasure of Sunday to which he was looking so ardently? Something of that sort. Sunday had been appointed. To Sunday then.

Presently things would change. The posts now were beginning to bring him the invitations which at that time of year fell to him, as to most of the other young men of decent birth and respectable appearance, from — as it seemed — the skies. His grandmother, long as it was now since she had gone out or entertained in London, had never lost touch with her friends. To her, in the first instance, it may be guessed, was the presence of his name on the lists of ball-givers ascribable. He welcomed now each card as he took it from its envelope. At some of the houses to which he was bidden, for functions which mostly proclaimed themselves Small or Very Small, he must meet a girl whom Mrs. Constaple was taking out. There was Easter to come before the season actually began, but that was less than a fortnight off now, and in a very short time the gaieties would be in full swing. Then he might hope to encounter her often. Then he might take to haunting the spots where it was to be expected that she would be found: the Park in its hours; Ranelagh and Hurlingham in theirs; the opera, the ballrooms. Meanwhile to Sunday. . . .

Saturday night came. By that time sleep had returned to his eyes. He slept through the whole of it. Came Sunday morning; came Sunday afternoon; came the moment

when in the wake of the butler he crossed the stone hall, ascended the wide, gentle stairs, and was shown into Mrs. Constaple's drawing-room.

Mrs. Constaple, rising from her place near a tea-table, and gathering up an armful of little dogs from her lap, welcomed him cheerfully.

"Very glad to see you," she said, and pulled at her husband's sleeve, just as she had pulled at it on the occasion of the dinner-party. "Mr. Herrick, my dear. You remember Mr. Herrick. We were talking of your grandmother at lunch. So sad about poor Stephen. You were with her. Well, afterwards, anyway. A great comfort to her, I know. Sit down by me here and let me give you some tea."

The rooms seemed to be full of people, — men for the most part, — the usual Sunday roomful of visitors. Cora St. Jemison was not amongst them, Christopher thought for a moment. But, the next, he had seen her, and had seen that she saw him. She was at the far side of the room. She was sitting exactly where she had sat when he had been hurried across to her to be introduced to her and take her down to dinner.

Mr. Constaple talked of Mrs. Herrick, and said almost precisely what he had said before, or repeated what had been said to him. Christopher waited for "Engages her own keepers, they tell me," and it came; with "Marvellous!" to follow.

"She must be — let me see — But we won't go into that."

He said this too.

Christopher listened to all with as much attention as he could contrive. He was acutely conscious of the group at the other side of the room. He was not wishing to join it, but hoping that presently it might disperse. He knew, without seeing, that Miss St. Jemison, having seen him, did not look again in his direction. He waited now for his hostess to speak of her, and she did.

"Told me she had met you," she said, when the name he

was waiting for came round at length. "My own girl married last year, you know, — Geraldine, you remember Geraldine?"

Christopher had not heard that her daughter was married. That, then, was how she came to be taking out some one else's. He remembered Geraldine, whom he was to have taken in to dinner.

Mrs. Constaple patted her dogs.

"Rather dears," she said, "ain't they? — I meant to have given myself a rest this year, but, after all, perhaps it's just as well that I can't. — No, this one has the best head," — we may suppose Christopher to have been saying all the right things, — "and look at his sweet little nose. Did you ever see anything so appealing? — What was I telling you? Oh, to be sure. Now I shall *have* to go to things, and I daresay if I had n't, I should only have got lazy; stuck at home, you know, and worn tea-gowns and lost my figure. — Yes, my angels, you shall have your biscuits."

It was the dogs after that for five minutes.

"Besides," she said then, as if there had been no interruption, "I was sorry for her."

Christopher winced.

"*And* besides, — that's enough, preciouses; not any more, — if I'm not greatly mistaken she's going to do me credit and be *rather* a success. You've no idea how much she seems to be admired."

Christopher, arresting a glance in her direction, feared that he had.

But the moment came. Mrs. Constaple, having decided that the dogs had had enough biscuits, must needs straightway present one more to the angel with the best head and the sweet little nose. The other two angels, perhaps, were jealous? Be this as it may, in an instant three little angels were at each other's sweet little throats, and hell ("to scale") was let loose on the hearthrug. When the tumult, the shrillest if the smallest imaginable, was over,

and the commotion, which was wholly disproportionate, had subsided, and three laps for one held the three little fighters, the distribution of the people in the room was changed, as the groupings of colours are changed at the turning of a kaleidoscope. Christopher was then to be found sitting by Cora St. Jemison, whose lap held one of the little animals, upon a distant sofa. He had manœuvred for this, of course, but, with a glow for the pain at his heart, he knew that, if she had not helped him, she must at least have acquiesced in his endeavour.

"I want to go back to what we were talking of on Monday," he said.

He was extraordinarily happy as he sat down beside her. All that he had thought of and dreamed of seemed as if it must be coming true. She did not answer him at once.

"I never want to go back," she said, then. "I want to go on."

"Oh, I want to go on," Christopher said. "That's why I want to go back — that we may go straight on from where we were then."

"Where were we then?"

"At Victoria Station."

She was wearing a black dress, which emphasised the exquisite fairness of her skin. Her hands, the beautiful hands which he had noticed before, lay in her lap beside the little dog.

"Well?" she said gently.

"I'm — I'm waiting for leave to go on."

They were almost isolated where they were. A grand piano, cumbered with ornaments, drapery, photographs, flowers, — the piano of a thousand unmusical drawing-rooms, — divided them from the others. The backs of the frames which held the photographs were towards them. He knew exactly what the photographs themselves would be: two or three signed likenesses of minor royalties; a celebrity or so; a singer, perhaps, who had sung at Mrs. Constaple's concerts; Geraldine in her drawing-room dress;

her mother in hers; an "enlargement" on porcelain in colour — probably Mr. Constaple's mother.

Under what he was saying, under what he was thinking, Christopher, grateful for the screen which these things afforded him, was conscious of feeling that, none the less, they should all have been cleared away. In imagination he saw the piano standing free.

And all the time he saw the lovely quiet hands on the black dress, and felt the smart which their loveliness caused him. He wanted to hide his face in them.

"You don't say anything," he said at last.

"Oh, yes, I do," she said quickly. "But I don't know quite what to say — what you expect me or want me to say. I think I have said a good deal. I did the other day. If I have n't told you to say what is in your mind, I have n't told you not to. Perhaps it would be better if I did tell you not to."

"No," he said; "don't do that."

"Then of course I want to know. I should n't be a woman if I did n't want to know, for instance, what you meant the other day when you said, 'That's just what was happening.' Do you remember saying that? How could you recognise me if you had never seen me before?"

"I think I have been looking for you most of my life."

"But you told me you had n't seen me till that day!"

"Looking for some one, then."

She shook her head in token that she did not understand. How should she? He did not understand, himself. But he knew that what he was telling her was true.

"But me?" she asked.

"You — if it turned out to be you."

She looked at him contemplatively. He was leaning forward, his hands clasped round one knee, his eyes on her face. He had himself well in control.

"No. I'm quite sure I don't understand," she said then. "But I want to," she added, a moment later. "I'm trying to. I even think I could."

"I'm sure you could," said Christopher. "Understanding comes into it. I've been looking for some one whom, — well, — whom I should know when I met — whom I should recognise as the person I was looking for."

It must have sounded all rather involved — an argument indeed in a circle. He did not even make grammar of it.

"That was to be the sign — your knowing?"

He did not answer her in words. He looked at her steadily.

"And you thought you recognised this person in me?"

"I did recognise this person in you."

He said that so low that she hardly heard it, but she did hear it. Neither said anything then for a moment or two. Christopher did not shift his position. She did not even move her hands. He wondered what she would think if she knew how the sight of them affected him.

"Before I met you I was looking for you, and since — I've done nothing else. Where were you going that day when I saw you starting for somewhere from Victoria?"

"Marienbad, probably. We generally go there at that time of year. No. I remember. We went to Wiesbaden that summer."

"I went there!" said Christopher.

So they talked. Outside were the Constaples and their visitors. A door was opened, and newcomers were announced and came in. But they settled down. Some one got up to go. But even he went. No one had come over yet to disturb the two sheltered by the photographs and the piano. Such luck could not last. Presently some one would get up who would want to bid Miss St. Jemison good-bye. Or some one who wanted to talk to her would intrude himself upon them. So far she herself had shown no inclination to move.

"Then you did know about Wiesbaden?"

"No. That's just it. I went to heaps of places. I did

n't know where to begin. Think." He smiled gravely. "The whole of Europe was before me to choose from — the whole world, for that matter. But there were likely places. Homburg seemed one of them. Wiesbaden another. I tried Trouville too."

"Do you really mean," she said, "that you really went about?"

Christopher thought of the long-suffering Harringay as he nodded.

But now came the interruption. Mrs. Constaple was seen bearing down on them. She wanted her third little angel to show to Lady Somebody, in tow, who had little angels of her own; and Christopher (in parenthesis) was introduced to Lady Somebody, who remembered (also in parenthesis) that she had known his father and mother in India, and for five minutes all was dogs and India. By the time Christopher, who was given the angel with the second-best head to hold, had disentangled himself, some one else had taken his place on the sofa.

He waited for a minute or two on the chance of getting back to it, but in vain. What he had looked forward to so fervently all the week was over.

He went to say good-bye to Mrs. Constaple.

One solace was vouchsafed him.

"You must dine with us one night and do a play. Tuesday?"

Her husband reminded her that she was dining out on Tuesday.

"Wednesday, then. No, not Wednesday. Perhaps it would be better to write. Yes, I'll write to you. Have I your address? Cloisters Street, Westminster, number three. I'll put it down."

Would she remember it? He could hardly count on her memory, he told himself. Well, he would take the precaution of leaving a card in the hall as he went out. But he wished he could have seen her write down his address then and there.

"Good-bye, and always on Sundays, and very often about tea-time any other day. Remember me to your grandmother if you should be writing to her."

"And me" (cordialest Constaples!). "Greatest admiration for your grandmother. Always had. Not many of her school left."

Christopher went over to say good-bye to Miss St. Jemison. She rose and came towards him a little, leaving the usurper of his place on the sofa.

"I suppose I've said odd things to you to-day," he said as he put out his hand. "I — want to thank you for letting me say them."

He did not know what to do with his evening. The singing mouse sang in the small hours that night, and he heard it, with the telling of the hours themselves by Big Ben.

CHAPTER XIII

USELESS to try to work. He went back to his walking. Chelsea always called to him when he was restless. And he went to Chelsea three times. He would make for the Embankment and pace it from end to end. Chelsea held the river. Westminster held it too, but Chelsea more intimately. He would lean upon the wall and look . . .

When the tide was low, as it was upon two of these occasions, and the stony foreshore above the mud was to be seen, with tiny waves breaking on it, he would succeed in feeling he was near the sea. A boy or two, paddling, lifting the larger stones even, as if little crabs might be found under them, once helped the illusion. He wanted the sea.

Or he would stand and look at the old church and its monuments, and, for some easily traceable association of ideas connecting tombs with urns, weeping-willows, and a picture worked in silk, think of Charlotte and Werther.

For the second time in his life he felt lonely; had the sense of giving and of always having to give — always being doomed to give — more than he received or would ever receive. Yet he had plenty of friends, if it was companionship that he needed; and if love, loving even as he did — never, that is, knowing what it was to be wholly out of love at any period — it is doubtful whether (in bulk at any rate, if one may speak so of love!) he was not offered or given more than he gave. Hearts that he never dreamed of were sore for Christopher.

He saw the days slip by: Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, watching the posts. Each time that he came in he scanned the letters that lay on the hall table, for a letter, or looked to see Mrs. Rommage with a telegram in an anxious hand.

His mother wanted him to go home for Easter, and Easter was creeping upon him. Here was Wednesday, the middle of the week, and he had not let her know whether or not to expect him; Thursday; hope died within him. His address, it was plain, was forgotten, or the tentative invitation, if not he himself, and so all three. He packed his bag and went down to Datchet.

Fatima, a tall girl now with soft romantic eyes and a thick orderly pig-tail, met him at the station in the governess cart, and with the fat pony which even her timid mother could drive. She, therefore, as having the first opportunity, was the first to see that something preoccupied or disturbed him. Time was when she would have flung "Your White Girl, I suppose" in his teeth, and waited snorting to get to grips with him. Now, her outlook changing, she wanted to be the Understanding Sister, the Consoler, the Unselfish Confidant. "Tell me your troubles," was what she wanted to say; "pour your sorrows into my ear. *I* shall understand. *I* shall sympathise. Don't be afraid. Tell me everything." What she did say was, "I suppose Datchet looks very small after London," with, "Still, the peacefulness of the country might be a great help to one, I should think, if one felt one *wanted* help," just to show him that she was there, so to speak, if he should be disposed to open his heart to her.

There was something about him: gloom, absence of mind, nerves on edge. The ordinary cheerfulness of the holiday-maker who comes home, of the welcomed arrival even, seemed an effort to keep up.

Anne saw it next, and saw it at once. As she kissed him and received his kiss she knew that his heart or his thoughts were roving. His stepfather saw nothing, and said, "Nonsense," later, to his wife's half-spoken question. Trimmer, by Saturday, had observed to her mistress that Master Christopher, or Mr. Christopher, as of course she should say, did not seem quite Himself.

It was Christopher's mother then who said, "Nonsense."

Well, Good Friday — except, as Fatima said, for the Buns — is not a cheerful day. It might have been that.

The only clue was the "No more posts, I suppose," which escaped him after breakfast that morning, and did not, needless to say, escape his mother.

It was a letter, then. But she continued to observe him.

His appetite was poor. He played with his food rather than ate it. He might have been a High Churchman fasting.

Anne, despite her theory, could n't see that in absolute silence.

"I thought you liked mutton cutlets."

This at luncheon, after seeing him eat nothing to speak of at dinner the night before, and nothing to speak of at breakfast.

"So I do."

"Then, my dear boy — And you ate no salt fish either."

Christopher said that she would not wish to see him grow fat. Even Ancebel had seen the error of fatness.

"Salt fish would n't make you grow fat. Cutlets would n't make you grow fat."

She made a sign that the cutlets should be handed to him again. But Christopher shook his head to them.

He behaved little better at dinner, though he was careful to make a pretence of helping himself to most of the dishes which were offered to him. He had "food to eat that they knew not of." Anne was dimly conscious of some such conviction at one period of his boyhood. It was bitter food then, and certainly it could not be nourishing.

So passed Good Friday and Saturday. With Sunday came a change. If it was a letter that he wanted, Easter Sunday's post must have brought it. He came down looking radiant.

He had got his letter. Before he had opened it, one of three which, in Mrs. Rommage's anxious scrawl, had been

redirected to him from Cloisters Street, he knew that he had got it at last. But more, far more than this. For (and it is here that we have Christopher!) in the handwriting in which, under his landlady's wavering erasures, it had in the first instance been addressed, he had recognised, if you please, the handwriting of one whose handwriting he had never yet seen. That he had not seen what he recognised mattered nothing, we may be sure, to Christopher, who was particularly good at such recognisings! The "Christopher Herrick" which stood, and the "3 Cloisters Street" which had been crossed out, were written, he decided, — could have been written! — by no one but Cora St. Jemison. He broke the seal confidently, and was not mistaken.

He was bidden to dinner the following Wednesday. Mrs. Constaple, Cora wrote, had mislaid his address. She, Cora, had just found it in the little dogs' basket, — chewed but decipherable, — and wrote, for her hostess, to explain, and to hope that Wednesday would find him free.

So once more he had something to live for — a day towards which to press, and all was well. It was as if he had been given the freedom of the house. The invitation was not so much an invitation to dinner on a particular night as an authority, without which he felt he could not have gone there again. Without it, one invitation acting and reacting upon another, the "Come agains" and "Come soons" of the Constaples' farewell to him would, he felt, have availed him nothing. He could not have risked the appearance of wishing to remind them of something which had been forgotten. Well, neither it nor he had been forgotten at all! The scatter-brained lady — unless it was his card which her little dogs had chewed — must even have committed his address to paper. Blessings upon her; blessings for cursings. And, in the end as at the beginning, it was by the hand of Cora St. Jemison that this good knowledge all came to him.

So, on many counts upon that Easter morning he went

his way rejoicing, a letter in a pocket over his heart. All through church, to which he went with the rest of his family, he was conscious of its presence there. He pressed it to him when he knelt, and during the sermon folded his arms in such a way that he could feel it with his hand.

For the rest of his stay he was seen to be in his usual health and spirits. He rode with his stepfather or Ancebel, walked or drove with his mother, found time to sit sometimes in the work-room with Trimmer (making her sewing smell, as she said, of smoke!), and was happy.

But Anne, confirmed in her conjectures, was vaguely troubled. A sentence once spoken by Mrs. Herrick rang persistently in her ears: "He'll be falling in love one of these days, and then he'll have you by the —" Well, what the sentence rang in! Anne was not sure that "the throat" would not have finished the dreadful prophecy more aptly.

CHAPTER XIV

He went back to London, then, leaving his mother reassured on the score of his health, but just a little bit uncomfortable, and just a little bit hurt too. Why she should have felt hurt she would not have found it easy to say. The time had come long since when, in common with every mother, she had had to realise that she did not, and could not, know the whole of the life of her son. He had had a separate existence since the day he had thoughts to put into words. It was his stepfather who had helped her, somehow, to understand him. But she wished he could have told her, as she was left to guess, that some one had come, or seemed likely to come, into his life — that she could have heard from his lips no more than she had seen with her eyes: no more, that is, than that if he was happy he had been unhappy; and he might have trusted her not even to ask why. For her vague sense of anxiety — uncomfortableness — she had no particular reason to give herself.

Christopher left in the morning. She saw him off at the station. And then, for discipline as much as exercise, — partly even to combat the feelings described, — she walked in to Windsor, where there was always some shopping to be done. As she crossed the iron bridge midway, she too looked at the river for solace. The water that she looked at would in time flow through London, towards which Christopher also at that moment was travelling. It would flow through Westminster even, within sight of some of the windows of Cloisters Street.

At the thought she leaned towards it.

Who is she, Christopher, who is going to take you from me? Ah, you think she won't take you from me, but she

will. I know her, whoever she is, and what is in her heart. She'll love you, I don't doubt. Set your mind at rest about that. But you'll never be to her what you've been to me. How could you be, when you're part of me, flesh of my flesh? Your father gave you to me. Don't think I've forgotten him. There is n't a day even now that I forget . . .

The thought trailed away. She came back to it upon another.

But don't think from this that I don't love John Hemming. You gave me John Hemming, do you know that? They both understand. Your father does if he knows, and he does know, I'm sure; and John knows — oh, John knows, my dear good John. Your father gave me a male child into my arms . . .

The pause on the bridge took meaning. She leant closer to the iron, closer to the water. So may the Blessed Damozel have leaned upon the gold bar of Heaven.

And you love her, Christopher, whoever she may be. You love her more than all of us. For her sake you'll leave us all gladly. The great mystery, Christopher: "For this cause shall a man leave his father and mother" . . .

Not in words was Anne's heart outpouring itself — certainly not in these. Her spirit, like Christopher's to the walls of his room, unburdened itself silently. A woman stands on a bridge and looks down into the flowing stream.

Tell me. Tell me yourself. Don't let me hear it from others. Tell me what you can. Tell me when you can. Only tell me.

Silence, more silence. The thoughts come at intervals like the sentences spoken from the Table at the Sacrament of the Lord's Supper.

A cart was to be seen along the road, and a little farther on, an old man afoot. Both were coming in her direction. She became conscious of their approach. In another moment she must move.

Oh, Christopher, my son, my first-born . . .

But that, if it, too, was unvoiced, was a cry; and tears gathered in Anne's eyes.

The cart was quite near now. She took out her handkerchief and dried her eyes. She turned quickly to the river and addressed it once more. She was sending her message: —

"Tell him," she said, this time forming words with her lips, and even speaking them under her breath, — "tell him that from my heart I wish him the wish of *his* heart. If it's good for him, though it shall pierce mine, I wish him the wish of his heart."

The impulse was satisfied. She continued her way. To the cart and the old man, when they passed her, she was just a lady walking to Windsor, and stopping on the bridge, as she crossed it, to look at the view.

Christopher, shown into Mrs. Constaple's drawing-room that evening, found it empty. He had been asked for seven, as seats had been taken for a play, and had hoped by good fortune to find himself the first to arrive. He had an idea that Mr. Constaple would not be of the party, that Mrs. Constaple could not fail to be late, and that the odds were against the punctuality of any one else who might be expected. In these circumstances it might happen that he would have a word with Miss St. Jemison alone.

Things fell out as he hoped. The door had hardly closed behind the servant when it was opened again, and Cora St. Jemison came in.

Even now he could not meet her without a tremor. She came towards him in her white dress.

Thus beautifully did the evening begin. After sundown the spring days grew chilly, and a fire was burning cheerfully in the grate. They shook hands and went towards

the hearth, where they stood presently, each with an arm against the mantelpiece.

She had been with her father for Easter, she told him — at Brighton. And he, what had he been doing with himself? He began to tell her.

As he spoke of his mother, he tried to see the two together, and found suddenly that he could not. One or other receded in his attempt. This was strange, for he could always call up the image of his mother in his mind's eye — always! Now, looking at Cora, he could not. He looked away and could see her — visualise her at once; looked back and she was gone. Or, looking away, he could visualise the girl in her white dress, see her to minutest detail, and then (blotting out her image, however!) see his mother. The two together he could not see.

Something came over the moment to cloud it.

She must have seen, for he saw her looking at him questioningly.

He shook his head as if she had put her question into words.

"You looked as if you saw ghosts."

At the sound of her voice the cloud, if it was a cloud, dispersed. Cora St. Jemison had that in her speaking voice which always made people ask if she sang. Christopher, hearing it, remembered that he had wanted to ask her this the first time he heard her speak, and he wanted to ask it now.

"I don't see ghosts. I'm not the kind. I — I was thinking that when you were there you prevented one's seeing any one."

He may have known that he could say these things without impertinence.

"But if there was no one else to see?" she said, smiling. "You were seeing ghosts, you see."

"Perhaps I was trying to," said Christopher.

She appeared to think this over for a moment, but in the end dismissed it.

"You were telling me what you were doing," she reminded him presently.

There was so little to tell. If he had told her what he had really been doing he must have said, "Marking time. Kicking my heels. Waiting for this moment."

Without many words he gave a sufficiently recognisable impression of the quiet life in the Buckinghamshire village. He thought her eyes softened at the picture which he certainly did not draw, but which she may have made for herself. The house always affected him, and he may have conveyed something to her of its mellow charm.

"I like the deep window sills," she said.

"I've window sills in my rooms here in London."

So they left Datchet and came up to Westminster.

"How did you manage to find them?"

He told her of Mr. Jellicoe's Mrs. Rommage.

"I'd been looking, though."

"For window sills?"

"For window sills and other things. I knew the sort of rooms that I wanted. But I was n't sure that they existed."

"You knew them when you saw them?"

"Yes. One knows the outside of them in Hogarth's pictures — the inside, too. Oh, and in Rowlandson's, later. In Cruikshank's, even. The sort of windows that a jug is emptied out of on to somebody's head."

"You fling up the window sash," she said, and he saw with delight that she was with him.

"And there's a beadle somewhere below, and a woman with a basket of fish —"

She caught the idea at once, threw it back to him. They played with it like children with a ball.

"And the fish are plaice and have faces like people."

"And everything's going on at the same time. People going to church, and to the Beggar's Opera . . ."

"And Shows — Fat Women . . ."

"Some one being shaved in the street . . ."

"A dog stealing a bone . . ."

"A platform giving way; crashing down . . ."

"People playing cards underneath."

They paused breathless.

"I know your rooms," she said, smiling.

"That's the outside of them."

"The inside is — lawyers bringing somebody something to sign . . ."

"Or bailiffs taking possession . . ."

"No, they are too comfortable and orderly for that — all except your writing-table. There's a fine frenzy there. I do know your rooms, Mr. Herrick."

"Oh," Christopher was saying inwardly, "it *is* You. I knew it was You. I knew."

Cora herself at that moment may not have been sure but that he was right. Her eyes were shining, anyway. She looked even a little excited. However this may be, she was thinking probably that she had accounted for his "recognisings." He had "recognised" her, as he might be said to have recognized his rooms when he saw them. It must have been plain to her that he made pictures of everything.

Mrs. Constaple's entrance now broke in upon them. But Christopher felt that the fates had been generous, and that, for the time being, they had given as much as he could reasonably have expected or hoped. He turned cheerfully to his hostess, who came in trailing a scarf, and putting on the gloves which, in another minute or two, she would have to take off.

"I can only hope you'll all forgive me," she began, and stopped as she saw that the room held only the pair by the fire. She gave Christopher her hand and welcomed him. "But the others? Really it's too bad of Reggie. There's no excuse for him. There's less still for me, I know. But I *am* here and he is n't." She turned to Cora. "And Geraldine and Charlie. Really! I said seven punctually, and it's a

quarter past, and we shall have to go without our coffee, which she knows I hate doing. Really! Really! Really!"

Christopher, ardent playgoer as he was, cared little if they should be late for the play that night.

"My husband asked me to make his excuses — did Miss St. Jemison tell you? — a political dinner. Don't let me forget the tickets, Cora. They're on the mantelpiece there." She looked at the clock. "Really! Really!"

Cora stood still, smiling; and Mrs. Constaple, after once more sighing "Really! Really!" calmed down and came to anchor beside her. Then the door opened once more and the delinquents were announced in a bunch.

Geraldine, kissing her mother, said it was Charlie; and Charlie, on the other side, said it was Geraldine. "Reggie" — the Mr. Heccadon, Christopher saw, of the memorable dinner-party — said it was the Ridiculous Hour.

"Well, don't blame me if the fish is a cinder and we miss the first act. These two good patient people" — she looked at Cora and Christopher — "have saved you your scoldings."

Christopher waited for her "Now, let me see," and it came; but he was watching two people shake hands. "Charlie, will you take — no, that won't do. Yes, will you take Miss St. Jemison. Reggie and I separate, I remember, to keep you and Geraldine apart. Mr. Herrick, will you take my daughter. Come, Reggie . . ."

They made their way to the dining-room. It had been too much to hope, Christopher supposed, that he should find himself next Miss St. Jemison.

He sat between "Geraldine" (whose surname he now discovered from the slip of paper in front of her plate was Harringay!) and his hostess. Miss St. Jemison, on the other side of the table, had Mr. Heccadon at right angles to her on her right, and her hostess's son-in-law, Mr. Harringay, on her left.

For Christopher the rest of the evening was a failure.

His happiness, it seemed, had reached high-water mark in the good quarter of an hour, which ordinarily is the bad quarter of an hour, before dinner. He talked to Mrs. Harringay and learned that his Harringay — the Harringay of the wanderings and of Château So-and-So memory — was a distant cousin of Charlie's over there. He talked to his hostess of he knew not what, and joined in the conversation when it was general. But all the time, though he managed to keep his eyes from her, he was conscious of no one but Cora — or, more accurately (since of one other at the table he was acutely conscious), of no one but in relation to her. Geraldine's husband, he perceived, was still too lately married, and too much in love with his wife, to have eyes for any one else. The two, indeed, exchanged glances of affection and mutual understanding all through dinner. But the man whom Mrs. Constaple addressed and spoke of as "Reggie," and whom Christopher, for some reason or other, had not forgotten, kept the one girl of the party engaged in a conversation which Christopher, itching to hear, tried vainly not to listen to. Something in his manner displeased Christopher. An assumption of proprietorship? Too much to say that. Something of the sort, however. If so, it was the distant cousin of his friend Harringay who should have resented it, for he and not Mr. Heccadon — nor Christopher either, for that matter! — had taken her down to dinner. Harringay's distant cousin talked contentedly to his mother-in-law, and looked at his wife.

Cora St. Jemison's voice reached Christopher from time to time, and her soft laugh. She seemed interested and amused. He could not help knowing this. What had he, then, to object to?

But he did object; he did inwardly, and presently — albeit still inwardly — furiously object to something to which Cora St. Jemison herself, it was apparent, did not. He could not define what it was that he so strenuously resented. It was upon her account rather than his own

that he resented it — whatever it might be. The feelings aroused in him were akin to those which he had experienced when he saw the looks which were turned upon her in the street. It was as if these looks were incarnate in the man at the end of the table, who leant so perpetually towards her as he spoke. Need he have so leant towards her . . . ?

And Cora did not mind. She could smile into his face and drop her voice when he dropped his. He had good looks of a kind. He was justified, Christopher saw, in being clean-shaven, and had strong-looking white teeth. Christopher wondered now how he could ever have thought him negligible.

Mrs. Harringay was speaking.

She was the sort of person who is always surprised to find the world small, and, for the second time, as if she narrated some marvellous occurrence, she was saying, —

"So it was you that Charlie's cousin went abroad with."

Yes, Christopher repeated; it was he. As well talk of one thing as another.

"I was doing my in-law visits when I met him. Quite one of the nicest of my new relations. He must have mentioned your name, but I never thought of connecting it with you. Of course I'd only met you once, but I'd often heard of you. Did n't he tell me he'd been abroad with you before? Oh, yes. It was you who rushed him round Germany or somewhere, and would n't let him stay anywhere. He wanted to stay at Homburg."

"Who would n't let who stay at Homburg?"

It was the husband chipping in from the other side of the table.

"Mr. Herrick — your Cousin Philip."

"That's years ago," said Christopher.

"He remembers it still. You took him to place after place and would n't let him stay in any of them."

Cora St. Jemison looked over at him. Was it possible that she was not so unconscious of him as she seemed? For a moment the weight lifted; but her neighbour, who

had paused in what he was saying to follow her eyes with his own across the table, and had decided apparently that there was nothing there to detain him, turned back to her at once, and again absorbed her attention. Mrs. Constaple's excellent dinner was as ashes in the mouth of one of her guests.

After dinner all was haste. The men had hardly lighted their cigarettes before the carriages were at the door, and the butler came in to announce them. Mrs. Constaple was heard on the stairs at the same moment.

Harringay, cousin of Harringay, the decanters round him, said that there was no hurry and that they would finish their wine, or their cigarettes, or their coffee, as the case might be, and, in the same breath, that perhaps they had better be moving. The contents of a glass or a cup were gulped down, and a move was made for hats and coats.

Mrs. Constaple stood at the foot of the stairs drinking her coffee. She had forgotten the tickets, and a footman was despatched for them. Geraldine came down putting her cloak about her. Then Cora.

The Harringays had their own carriage, a coupé, and were sent off in it, and may be thought of as holding hands in it from Grosvenor Street to the Strand. Mr. Heccadon, it seemed, had a private hansom, — the conveyance just then of the male idle rich, — and, for Christopher, there was a hideous moment in which his suggestion that he should take Miss St. Jemison was allowed to be played with more or less seriously.

"Do as you like," Mrs. Constaple said. "In these changing times — I learnt this long ago from Geraldine — I'm not competent to give an opinion."

Mr. Heccadon grinned, waiting.

"Still, if you ask me, my dear —"

Cora may have seen Christopher's face. She shook her head with a soft laugh and followed her hostess.

"Then we must be content to put up with each other," said Mr. Heccadon, turning to Christopher with a smile.

It was only one more ill which the horrible evening was doing him. Gall and wormwood to Christopher to accept anything from this man, but he had no excuse for refusing; so with as good a grace as was possible in the circumstances he took the offered seat. It soothed him in some sort to think that the invitation, which might have been worded more happily, could scarcely have been worded more aptly.

"At least, we can smoke," Mr. Heccadon said, holding out his cigarette-case; and Christopher had at any rate the opportunity of politely refusing something.

"Worst of women, they fuss so. Why not have let us finish our dinner comfortably and be late? Have n't I met you before there?"

Christopher, wondering whether he remembered, said that he had dined with Mrs. Constaple once before.

If there was any reserve in his tone Mr. Heccadon did not appear to observe it. He smoked in ruminative silence for a minute or two and then chuckled.

"That was funny, was n't it?"

"What was?"

"Oh, about the lift, you know. Coming with me, I mean. Not coming, you know."

Christopher's muscles were all taut. He was as far into his corner as it was possible for a person of his size to get.

"Ever seen her mother?"

He took Christopher's inarticulate answer for No.

"There was a woman, if you like — is still, if you make some insignificant allowances for Anno Domini! I'm forty. I remember her — well, what shall we say? — well, quite a good many years back, anyway. She was fair. Women used to have golden hair, as it was called, in the seventies. That's gone out, of course, now, and last time I saw her — that was a couple of years ago, in Paris — hers was the usual red-brown. You know — the autumn colour. Most appropriate, really. But, by Jove! there was nothing else of autumn about her. Nothing of the sere and yellow leaf

about her — or the sere and yellow tooth, either, which is generally what that amounts to. She has a figure like a girl's and a mouth like a child's. Yes, by Jove, she was and she is a pretty woman."

Christopher, his nerves ajar, prayed that this summing-up might close the subject. Yet under his jarred nerves, under the discomfort which the mention of Cora St. Jemison's mother must inevitably cause him, he was conscious of feeling a sort of romantic interest in what he was being told. Even now, sometimes, he could remember her clearly as she had looked when she knelt beside him in the dust of the Champs de Foire at Boulogne. Chords of memory had been touched at the allusion to her hair. The "pity of unpitied human things" stirred in him. He remembered her shining hair — the golden ("as it was called") hair of the chignoned seventies, and again felt that he hated the man beside him. Something in the way that he spoke of her seemed an insult even to one who had forfeited the right to respect.

"Eh?" he said.

"I did n't say anything," said Christopher.

They were crossing Piccadilly Circus. The lights of it, which, as Lights of London, generally gave Christopher pleasure, struck him as hard and pitiless. For radiance he saw only a glare which showed him ugly things. He thought of his rooms and wished he was in them. He had little hope now that the evening, which had begun so happily, had anything but disappointment in store for him.

One more shock he had when, in Trafalgar Square, Heccadon said suddenly out of another of his ruminative silences: "Quite another type. Quite different. One sees these changings — throws-back, or whatever you call them."

This time it was Christopher who said "Eh?" or "What?"

"The daughter, you know. Quite different in appearance. All women are the same inside, one knows that, but

the outward unlikeness here is remarkable. She's got something, too, that her mother never had, for all her beauty. Something that Frenchwomen have oftener than English. Have you noticed? A subtlety! A mystery! But I can't give a name to it. Perhaps you can help me."

No, Christopher had not noticed, could not help him. He had difficulty in controlling the voice which said this. The strain of keeping silence was nearly intolerable — seemed suddenly wholly intolerable. He must get out. He could not sit still and hear any more. He must get out, or he could not answer for what he might do. He wanted to take the man by the throat, or strike him across the mouth. How dare he take Miss St. Jemison's name on his lips? How dare he savour her, as it were, on his tongue; compare, gauge, appraise her? How dare he invite Christopher to discuss her with him?

Almost involuntarily he raised one hand towards the trap, knocking his hat against the cushion at the back as he did so; he saw the other on the door in front of him rather than was conscious of placing it there.

At Christopher's movement Mr. Heccadon, who seemed perfectly unaware of his offence, looked at him enquiringly.

"Anything the matter?" he said.

It gave Christopher time to recollect himself. A common row? Was that what he had been on the point of precipitating? A vulgar quarrel? Two men start out together from a dinner-party for a theatre, and arrive separately at the place where the others await them! Not to be thought of. He brought the half-raised hand to his hat, as if it had been some jolt, and not his own impulsive act, which had jerked that out of place, and, as the hansom swung round into the Strand, affected to steady himself with the other. He was wise enough to let his action answer for itself.

"Your man drives fast," he said. "We shan't be so very late."

They were bound for the Gaiety. They got there without further incident.

This time, Christopher believed that he might have sat next to Cora. He stood back and let Heccadon take the vacant seat beside her. The horrible evening would drag itself out to its end.

CHAPTER XV

SINCE the worst that was said of him afterwards was that he talked to you and thought of something else at the same time (it was Geraldine who said this), it may be supposed that he acquitted himself fairly well. He smoked a cigarette with Harringay's distant cousin between the acts, and talked of the play and of Harringay. He kept out of the way of Mr. Heccadon, and of Miss St. Jemison. He put Mrs. Constaple's cloak about her shoulders when all was over, and picked up her fan for her, and her handkerchief, and the case of her opera-glasses. He it was who went out to find her footman for her, and to watch for his reappearance with the carriage, though, the Harringays having had the good luck to chance at once on their bridal coupé, that left Mr. Heccadon the freer to talk to Miss St. Jemison. From the steps Christopher saw him so talking to her. He was spared and he spared himself nothing.

The relief came, and the unbearable pain with it, when he found himself alone.

He crossed the Strand and went down to the Embankment. Again came relief as he left the noise and the turmoil behind him; and again, as if the cessation of them gave it fuller scope, the unbearable pain.

What was this pain? What had he done to deserve it? No pain that he had ever endured was like this. His heart was aching as if it had been beaten. He stood still for a moment or two, breathing hard.

Poor Christopher, who saw what was not there, heard the unhearable, and now suffered what was not to be suffered! He had some dim inkling of how things were with him, but took no comfort from such vague perception. He only knew that, whereas he had been happy, he was at that

moment as unhappy a being as would be found in all London.

It was jealousy, was it, this pain? Not wholly. Honestly, not wholly. The Cora who had met him, laughed with him, seen eye to eye with him, in the few minutes that she had been alone with him before dinner, had receded to inaccessible distances in the hours that followed. Something which had been established between them then had crumbled under his eyes. She seemed two people. The Cora who had said that she knew his rooms was a different being from the Cora who had laughed into the eyes of her neighbour at dinner, and who had dallied with his suggestion that she should drive with him to the theatre. Even now Christopher felt sick, as with a sort of retrospective apprehension, at the thought of the potentialities of that drive. Could she not see what this man was? Could she not read what women were to him? What he thought of women? That she could like him was unthinkable; and he could see that she did like him.

He went over to the other side of the road and looked stupidly at the water.

"What shall I do?" he said to himself. "What am I to do?"

He became conscious of some one beside him who begged from him, and he gave an impatient answer, not knowing what he said. The beggar, a girl, shuffled away into the darkness. A moment later he called to her.

"I'm unhappy, too," he said to her as he gave her a coin.

"Un 'appy — you?"

He looked at her gravely.

"No, sir, don't laugh at me."

She had a husky voice; a pretty little shabby face. She was like a bruised flower.

"I'm not laughing at you."

She peered at him from under her dingy hat, uncertain what to make of him.

"Well, I was 'appy meself once — on'y I did n't know I was. It's my belief we never do know."

She gave a little husky laugh. She looked at the coin in her palm, and saw that it was not the penny she had thought it. She closed her fist upon it quickly.

"Whatch un'appy for?"

He was not going to tell her that.

The girl took a long look at him. Something that was wistful, and in an odd sort of way motherly, too, came into her little pinched face of the gutter.

"Look 'ere. She don't mean it," she said in her strange little washed-out voice. "Not if she's any good, she don't mean it. She don't know when she's well off, that's all. Got you, and don't know if she wants you; is that it? Got the kind sort — oh, my Gawd! — and don't know what that means. 'Ere." She pushed her hat back and showed a scar on her forehead. "See that? And 'ere." She pulled up the thin sleeve and shewed another on the thin arm. "That's the other sort. I know what I'm talkin' about. I've 'ad to know."

Christopher in turn was looking at her; he had looked at her before; really looking at her this time.

"Are you a witch?" he said.

"Witch!" She was a-spike in a moment: "who are y' callin' names? Witch! 'Ow old d' y' think I am?"

"Twenty-three?"

"Well, that's just what I am," she said, mollified. "'Least, I'm twenty-four. What d' y' mean, — witch?"

He did not explain.

She looked at the scar on her arm again and went back to what had been in her mind.

"Tell her. Make her know. Make her know without 'avin' to know for 'erself. We're fools, girls are, all of us — yes, rich as well as poor. Don't know what we want, any of us. Made like that, I believe. Can't 'elp ourselves. So don't believe it, sir. She don't mean it. If she's any good, she don't mean it." Her eyes swept over him again as they had swept over him when she spoke the words before, and the same look came into them. "If she does mean it, —

don't be angry, sir, — you take it from me she's no good. And if she's no good, — you take this from me, too, sir, — you go away. You clear. You" — she gave a common little gesture — "you *clear*."

She moved off then with a quick shuffle, and paused. She came back, holding out her palm.

"Did you know what you was givin' me?" she said shamefacedly.

He had not known. Ashamed of his impatience he had taken from his pocket the first coin that came to his hand. He smiled without speaking.

She nodded her thanks.

"It's a bed for a week," she said; and put it to her mouth — but not to bite it.

He was better after that. The pain came back and came back, rising always like a wave and sweeping over him, engulfing him; but it was not the unbearable pain of those first few moments, and each time that it ebbed, it left him a little less in reach of its fiercest onslaught. As he walked homewards under the stars the peaceful influences of the night began to soothe him. He could think more calmly of the evening which had left him so wounded and angry and sore.

Poor little drab who had comforted him! When the reckoning came, who knew that this that she had done would be forgotten to her? Poor little helpless thing who had helped him . . .

Looking back, he felt in his need that he could even have "told" her. No suffering, he learnt in that moment, goes or can go for nothing. Out of suffering grows what is best in the weakest of us.

He peered into the darkness to see if she might have followed him. He retraced his steps almost to where she had appeared to him. But she was nowhere to be seen. He had not let her know what she had done for him; had not even thanked her.

Big Ben was striking twelve as he turned into Cloisters Street. The thick, deep notes rang out slowly. He counted them to the twelfth. The day to which he had looked forward so earnestly was over.

Cloisters Street, his end of it anyway, was never quite dark, for a street-lamp stood opposite to number three. Christopher looked at the gentle old house, the beautiful fanlight over the door, the flat white windows. Yes, in terms of Hogarth and Rowlandson one aspect of it was to be expressed accurately enough. There were the sashes you flung up to empty your jug (or other vessel) on to the heads of roysterers below. There, in the mellow brick walls, was the dignified eighteenth-century background for the undignified businesses and follies of the streets. But though they might lend themselves to the broad humours of a coarser age, these were old walls with critical faculties, predilections, prejudices, sympathies. They had accepted him because he loved them, and they had seemed to have accepted Cora. It was difficult just then to think of Cora as understanding them, if she could tolerate — could tolerate . . .

It was jealousy, then!

Yes, he was sick with jealousy; made unjust with jealousy; made even ridiculous by jealousy.

The pain was back with him again. A very tidal wave of pain, this. It submerged him; left him half-drowned; choking; fighting for breath. The little drab on the Embankment could not succour him while the waters poured over his head; Cloisters Street could not; nor the message of the stars.

He took his key blindly from a pocket and let himself into the house.

A fortnight went by. Christopher walked it. He did, and attempted to do, no work. Some day, he supposed, what was in him, what he felt to have in him, would be re-

leased. But this was not yet. He was offered commissions which he did not accept. He offended a person or two. He was said to neglect opportunities. A rumour of this reached his stepfather, who did not tell his mother. He came to see him, however, and actually found him.

Christopher, unlike most young men with fathers or stepfathers, was never shy with the husband of his mother. It was strange how the two understood each other.

John Hemming, who could not have written a line to save his life, seemed to know by instinct what went to the writing of lines.

"Getting on, old boy?"

"Not a bit."

"That's all right. Wait for it."

Christopher was waiting, but was not sure that he was waiting for It.

"How's mother?"

"Waiting for you. When are you coming down to us again?"

"Not yet, Father John."

John Hemming settled himself more comfortably in one of Christopher's comfortable chairs.

"Come down and dine one night."

"No, John. Not just now."

"What is it, old boy?"

"It is n't anything. That's what's the matter with it. It is n't anything."

"And you thought it was."

Christopher nodded.

"And you can't work."

"Or play."

"Everything else hangs on it."

"Everything."

John Hemming lay back in his chair. He watched the smoke which twirled upwards, a twisting riband, from his cigarette.

"Nothing that I can do for you?" he said at last.

"Nothing that any one can."

He went to the window and looked out.

"There's nothing to do anything about," he said presently, without turning.

His stepfather contemplated his back — the muscular slimness, the way the head was set on the shoulders. Christopher had none of the uglinesses of the brain-worker — of the artist even. Even in love, as he undoubtedly was, he was still a healthy young animal. John Hemming's thought was not unlike that of the poor little drab when she said, "Got you, and don't know if she wants you!" He, too, at the thought, could have called Heaven to witness.

Christopher upon his part was thinking that his stepfather *was* a good sort. Who else would not have been asking him questions, or if not asking him questions, pointing out that he was not asking or going to ask him questions? He was only behaving as he always behaved, and that was splendidly.

There was a long pause.

"Mind, I don't know yet," Christopher said suddenly out of the silence.

It was as if the thing struck him as he gave it voice.

He did *not* know that he had cause for what he was feeling. It might conceivably be, that, with the injustice which he could believe himself to be doing to the man he disliked, he was doing Cora an injustice also. At least she was unheard.

John Hemming did not stay long. He had his train to catch. He did not say a word to Christopher about what it was that had sent him. He always held that Christopher, whatever he did or did not do, would ultimately be all right. Then what had he come for? No. Though he had known that probably no more would be said than had been said, he was not in any doubt as to why he had come; nor was he dissatisfied with the result of his visit. He remembered things which he had certainly not said to Christo-

pher's mother, and which none the less certainly had been conveyed to her. He remembered things, to make which clear to him she had not needed words. His marriage to her had largely been the outcome of such charged silences. He did not need Christopher's "You *are* a good sort, John, upon my soul you are," to tell him that he had helped him. There are moments, he knew this, when some one — a friend, that is — has only to be "there."

He had risen and he put out his hand.

"No, if you'll wait a second while I change my coat, I'll come with you to Waterloo."

Christopher dived into the next room. When he came back, pulling down his sleeves and settling his collar, John Hemming was standing in a patch of sunlight near one of the walls, running his finger along the lines of the panelling.

"What is it about them?"

"The walls?"

"Yes."

"The Datchet house has it too."

"I know. But I feel it even more here. It is n't only the panelling, though it's that partly. A Dickensy feeling. Sentiment. Friendliness. Rooms like these must help you, Christopher. They do, don't they?"

"All the time," said Christopher.

Yes, it was wonderful what John Hemming knew. So much more than you could possibly have expected from any one so thoroughly normal and sane. The thought that hung on this, if he had realised it, was one of wonder that any one should ever have let him go! His mother had wondered to amazement; wondered more and more in the passing of the years. Trimmer even, humbly, — as knowing her place, — had wondered too.

They crossed Westminster Bridge and threaded their way through the noisier traffic of the south side of the river to the station. At the entrance Christopher

said, "Shall I come down with you now and dine to-night?"

"Why not?" said his stepfather.

Anne never knew what she owed the pleasure of that surprise visit to.

John looked into the school-room (which had been the nursery), where she was sitting with Ancebel and her governess, doing work for an impending bazaar.

"Brought a man back to dinner," he said.

Anne hoped there was enough fish.

"Your precious Christopher," said John Hemming, with a wink at Fatima.

Well, he had n't, it seemed, come to break anything to her—which was Anne's first dreadful thought. All through dinner, which was a very cheerful meal, she was afraid that afterwards she would be told something which her husband probably knew already. But the evening, like the dinner, passed cheerfully and without event.

"What did he come down for?" she asked her husband afterwards.

"Nothing. He just came down."

"You went to see him."

"I was at the Stores. I just went to see him."

"All the same," she said, "he's not really himself. He was n't at Easter, and he is n't now."

"Oh, yes, he is," said John Hemming.

The evening was quite a happy one to Christopher. John, somehow, like the friendly rooms, had helped him. He went to bed in a happier frame of mind than he had known for days, and slept excellently. For the dull weight to which he awoke every morning he was conscious of a feeling of pleasant anticipation. Amongst his letters was a letter. He grew dizzy for a moment at the sight of it, and then opened it with trembling fingers. It was very short.

"Why don't you come and see us?" wrote Cora St. Jemison. "We know you are busy" (did they?), "but think you might spare time to see if we are still alive. Sundays always, as you know, but this week we shall be in on Thursday also."

"Might n't it be better that I should not?" Christopher wrote after long thought.

"Come," wrote Cora, "and tell me why."

CHAPTER XVI

It was now that Christopher began to be conscious of an acceleration in the movement of his affairs. A certain breathlessness pervaded them. Things seemed suddenly to be moving towards something. It was as if, for the very reason that they had stood still or appeared to stand still for so long, they now moved the faster.

There were two days, when he got Cora's second letter, between him and the day which she had named in her first. For the wish that he had to see the sea he spent one of them at Hastings, and filled his lungs with pleasant salt airs. Nothing happened there. He lunched upon sandwiches and fruit on the beach, and looked at the waves, and breathed deeply. The tide was coming in. Little odd memories of other incomings of the tide stirred in him, that was all. Things seen, and things only heard of or read about, were indistinguishable in the vague stirring of these. But as he looked he became conscious again of such stored impressions, and of the resultant teemings of his active mind — of the press, too, of something waiting to be released. He had not just then, as his deserted writing-table in Cloisters Street could bear witness, an idea worth committing to paper. But everything that he had ever seen or felt, with uncountable branchings and ramifications and offshoots, seemed imprisoned in him and to clamour to be let free. The sight and the smell of the sea intensified the feeling. It would be a hand which was not his that would do the releasing, and the releasing would take place soon.

Something, meanwhile, of calm had settled down upon him since John Hemming's visit and the evening that he had spent at home. The two together, renewing his hope, seemed as if they, in some way, must have brought about

the coming even of the letter which was to bring him into touch once more with the house from which he had been keeping away. In reality, of course, all they had done was, by distracting his attention from his distemper, to enable him once more to look ahead, and so forget his misgivings.

The day by the sea — the day with the sea, one might almost say, for the sea was his friend — still further soothed him. The sun was hot enough to allow him to lie on the beach. He surrendered himself to the pleasant influences of the peaceful afternoon. Presently he went into the town and had tea, and after tea he came back. The day drew to its close. He dined in the town and again he came back. He saw night fall and the stars come out. He watched the mysteries of the night deepen as clouds came up from the south. There was no moon. There were lights in the distance which seemed to breathe in the darkness. The stars themselves seemed to breathe . . .

He stayed till the last moment, and then, refreshed and renewed, came back to London.

Mrs. Constaple was out, he was told the next day, when he presented himself in Grosvenor Street; but Miss St. Jemison was at home. Christopher was shown, not into the great drawing-room, but into a smaller, more intimate room on the ground floor.

Here he found Cora surrounded by three or four people whom, if he was to see her alone, he foresaw that he would have to outstay.

She it was, this time, who rose from beside the tea-table to receive him.

"My little party to-day," she said. "Mrs. Constaple was to have come to it, but she had to go out. Do you know Mrs. Heccadon? — Mr. Herrick. And Miss Pentreath?" He knew Miss Pentreath and shook hands with her. "Mr. Pargitur, Mr. Herrick. M. de Parencourt."

They settled down. Christopher thought he was going to hate it. But he did not hate it. Mrs. Heccadon, some

connection, he supposed, of the Mr. Heccadon whom he had met at dinner, was of a type, it is true, which, just then establishing itself, did not appeal to him. There was a challenge somehow in her odd clothes and odd appearance, and Christopher thought to himself how sure he was that he did n't admire her — till the moment when she went to the piano. She was transformed then from a jaded rag of a woman into a thing of ardent beauty.

The people who would be singing the Indian Love Lyrics when their day should come along, or "Mélisande in the Wood," were singing the "Creole Love-Song" then for the "Garden of Sleep"; and she sang the "Creole Love Song." Her voice was small but extraordinarily sweet, with a curious little husky quality, too, which made Christopher think of the little drab on the Embankment. Cora hung over her after she had sung. In spirit they all hung over her.

"Now the 'Lorelei.'"

She looked at Cora, whose hand was on her shoulder, and smiled. She had a curious smile.

Sentiment ruled the hour, but that seemed exactly right.

They drew round with their cigarettes.

> "Ich weiss nicht was soll es bedeuten
> Das ich so traurig bin . . .

The sweet, husky voice was heart-breaking.

It seemed exactly right.

The room *was* exactly right, Christopher saw, — not overloaded like the big drawing-room upstairs. The grand piano, standing clear as an island, occupied one side of it, and with a writing-table and a bookcase constituted all the heavier furniture. If, as he guessed, the room had been Geraldine's and had now been apportioned to Cora, he was sure that for the attainment of its present simplicity, Cora must have done considerable discarding.

"Now the 'Asra.' May we? If you are n't tired? You are n't, are you?"

"If you're not."

Miss Pentreath, who knew no German, asked for the song in English.

Mr. Pargitur objected. The words were Heine's. It was Rubinstein's setting, was n't it, of Heine's poem?

Mrs. Heccadon nodded.

"All the same—" said Miss Pentreath.

"Yes, all the same —" said Cora.

So Mrs. Heccadon sang the song in English, which may have been quite wrong, but which, like Miss St. Jemison's choice of her songs, and like the room itself, seemed exactly right.

Again the sweet, husky voice took up its burden.

"Daily went the wondrous lovely
Sultan's daughter, at the cooling
Hour of evening, to the fountain,
Where the waters white were plashing.

"Daily, at the hour of evening,
Stood the young slave at the fountain
Where the waters white were plashing.
Daily grew he pale and paler.

"And one evening came the princess
And these sudden words addressed him:
'Thou must tell me what thy name is,
And thy country and thy kindred.'

"And the slave replied, 'My name is
Mahomet; I came from Yemen,
And my race is of the Asras
Who, whene'er they love, must perish.'"

Yes, as she sang it, it seemed exactly right — even though, as Mr. Pargitur, the purist, must needs point out, the "wondrous lovely Sultan's daughter" should certainly have read "Sultan's wondrous lovely daughter." And though, when they made her sing it again, she sang it, as it should be sung, in the original German, it still seemed to have been exactly right in English.

Silence fell on the party for a few moments after that.

Then six young people — Mrs. Heccadon, despite her wasted air, was young, and the others were all younger — discussed the song and its words.

"It was dreadful, his dying," Miss Pentreath held. "She ought to have saved him."

"You forget," said Mr. Pargitur. "She was a 'Lovely Sultan's daughter,' and he was a slave."

"Nothing could have saved him."

It was Cora who said this.

"But eef she lofe 'eem —"

Monsieur de Parencourt.

"She did love him."

Cora again, and they all looked at her.

"Of course she loved him. That was why she spoke to him. That was why she asked him his name. Above all, that was why she wanted to know — well, just about him. Everything about him: his country and his kindred. It's all in that. Of course she loved him."

(Oh, it *is* You, Christopher thought to himself once more — inwardly aglow as he heard!)

"Then eef she lofe 'eem —"

"Did n't she?"

She looked round for support, and paused at Christopher. But Christopher was n't sure.

"*He* had to die, of course. It was the only way of telling her that he loved her. But he did that gladly, I believe. So it was n't really dreadful."

It was as easy, he was thinking, to see her as the princess, as to see himself as her slave.

And then Mrs. Heccadon gave another rendering of the story altogether.

"No, she did n't care. She was a Sultan's daughter. A Lovely Sultan's daughter, as Mr. Pargitur points out. She liked being a Lovely Sultan's daughter, but more, even, she liked being a Sultan's Lovely Daughter. She lived deliciously, like the bad women in the Bible. She was

accustomed to being loved. She made people love her. If they did n't, she looked at them, and then they did. She looked at them from under her sleepy eyelids, which were n't really sleepy. *She* did n't sleep. She was too busy making men love her, to sleep."

"Oh, Margot!"

The protest came from Miss Pentreath. Cora made none.

"She was. It's truth I'm telling you. All men had to love her. Even slaves. She wanted the love of every man in the world. She had no use for it, only a need of it, and she got it — got it always."

Cora was listening intently. She was smiling now.

"And he? The slave?"

"She got his too. She only went to the fountain because he stood there. She was the woman whom all men do love."

"And did he die?" some one asked.

"He made the poem, and that lived."

It fell to Pargitur to point out what was obvious: that the poem was made of him — a very different thing; and to Miss Pentreath, who said she did not understand, to say further, "Besides, I thought it was Heine who made the poem."

Mrs. Heccadon was not to be trammelled by such accidentals as logic and fact.

"Nobody ever did or was anything yet who had not been mortally hurt. He was a slave and she turned him into a poet, or a poem, whichever you like. Heine imagined him because Heine knew. Every artist who has ever lived knows — every artist. His race is 'of the Asras, who whene'er they love must perish.'"

Christopher looked at her curiously. This was the merest drawing-room talk. In a way she was making up what she said as she went along. She had sometimes seemed under the dominion of one idea or set of ideas, sometimes of another. She was tilting at some one, but not all through at the same person. He could have believed that she had

two people in mind for the Sultan's daughter, only one for the slave. Still, there was a thought, however she might have entangled it, running through what she said, and upon this, as if she perceived its presence and saw a use for it, she had seized. All artistic achievement was arrived at, and only arrived at, at the cost of suffering. She might safely say that, and she said it.

"I do want to know if he died," said Miss Pentreath, — "the slave, I mean, not Heine."

"What does it matter?" Mrs. Heccadon said. "A man does n't always die the day he's killed."

She rose from the piano as she spoke, and became once more a rag of a woman of rather debased type.

"How did you like her?" Cora asked Christopher when the others had gone.

He had outstayed them all. The two other men had showed signs of a reluctance to go, or of a reluctance to leave him behind them. But he had not moved. He had meant from the first to outstay them, and he did. His dread now was that the door would open and Mrs. Constaple would come in. The door had opened once, but it was only to admit the footmen, who had cleared away the tea. They also were gone, and Cora and he were alone.

He said the patent thing: that she was wonderful when she sang.

"She's wonderful always," Cora said. "But you're quite right. She's an angel when she sings."

Christopher in the precious moments did n't want to talk of Mrs. Heccadon. Yet he felt constrained to talk of her. The strange, beautiful, husky voice seemed still to linger in the room.

"She said, 'A man does n't always die the day he's killed,'" he said. "What did she mean?"

"Shall I tell you? He's a beast, and she adores him. Any one would. He's that sort. But it took him — a man like him and a passion like hers — to make her wonderful little

singing what it is. For it is wonderful. She has n't a voice to speak of, and she has no particular method, and she's as hoarse as a raven, and her singing in its small way is divine. He's done that for her. Hopelessness has done that for her. It's killed her and made her articulate."

It was Mrs. Heccadon that Christopher was angry with for the things in that little speech, which, in spite of himself, made him wince. She had no right, he was thinking, to speak, as it was plain that she must have spoken, to a girl.

Cora was looking at the piano, as if she could still see Mrs. Heccadon's long slim hands on the keys. She gave an odd little soft laugh.

"If it is that, he's almost justified, is n't he?"

"Why do you hurt me like this?" Christopher broke out suddenly.

"Hurt you?"

She was genuinely surprised. There was no pretence about the look of enquiry which she turned on him.

"Yes, hurt me. You did, the other night, and you're hurting me now. No, you don't know why you're doing it now — in what way, I mean. I see that. But you knew, the other night, and it did n't stop you."

"Was that why you kept away?"

"Of course it was why I kept away. Do you think it was easy?"

"I don't know what I think," she said, with a little hesitation, "except — except that you're talking very strangely."

Christopher felt penitent at once.

" I suppose I am. I suppose I have from the very first. I suppose —"

He broke off.

She looked to see why.

"*That* was n't Heccadon?" he said. "That was n't her husband?"

"Of course that was Mr. Heccadon. Of course that was

her husband. Why should n't Reggie Heccadon be her husband?"

There was a long pause.

"More even than I knew," he was thinking.

The oddest string of Buts was in his mind. "But I did n't know he was married," alternated with "But he dines out without her." "But he made love to you" — a difficult But, this, even to put into the thought which hardly needs words. "But you let him"; a more difficult still. "But Mrs. Constaple asks him without her?" and "But she calls him Reggie as if she liked him," were in some sort variants of one thought. "But you kissed her" summed up all these Buts. "But you kissed her": all these Buts put together!

The pause let her see something of what he was thinking. She picked out the most obvious of his protests and dealt with it.

"She won't dine out with him if she can help it. Most people know that now."

That did not seem to make it any better — did not even sound to make it better. Cora may have felt this.

"They both dine here, but they dine on separate nights. It's an understood thing. People who know fall in with the arrangement; people who don't — just blunder. They have plenty of the same friends, and plenty of different ones. They go their own ways."

"And when people dine with them?"

"Oh, well, I suppose they manage to discriminate at their own parties. I don't know, for I've never been. The Constaples dine with them sometimes."

Christopher's expression may have asked what he did not.

"Oh," she said, answering his thought. "I don't know. Perhaps she does n't mind what she does n't see."

It came back to the last of his Buts.

"She sings beautifully," he said.

There was a pause after that. He thought of the pale

dissatisfied face, and the curiously beautiful husky voice. He believed that she did mind what she did n't see, that she knew all that she chose to ignore.

"I think she sings more beautifully than any one I know," Cora said in course of time.

The tones of her voice struck him again, and he remembered irrelevantly that he had not even yet learned whether she herself sang. If she did, he thought that he would expect her singing voice to be not unlike Mrs. Heccadon's. The thought pointed the scantiness of his knowledge of her. How little he knew of her! She was so infinitely much to him, and he knew her scarcely at all.

They had got away from what they were saying.

He went back to it with the words which had broken from him before.

"Why do you hurt me? Why do you want to hurt me?"

"How do I hurt you? I don't want to."

"Then why do you?"

"I don't willingly. I thought you would have sat next me at the theatre the other night. I made Charlie Harringay move. I meant that place for you. You would n't take it."

"You would have driven with that man in his hansom." It was out now. He could not recall it, and he let himself go.

"You talked to him the whole evening. No, not the whole evening. That was what was cruel. Before dinner you — well, it was wonderful. I could hardly believe my good fortune. Then think — think of dinner; think of after dinner. I don't know what right I have to — to talk to you like this. None, I suppose, unless suffering gives one a right. I was in pain, I tell you. I am now. I — I am now."

He turned away from her, and leaning upon the piano he buried his face in his hands.

"Don't speak to me," he said. "Just for a minute, don't speak to me."

She could hear him breathe hard. She could see his

fingers pressing against his forehead and his hair. Neither spoke for some seconds.

He had not meant thus to precipitate matters. He had not come, indeed, with any formed plan. He had come because she had asked him — because, her invitation having made it possible for him to go to the house again, he could not have kept away.

She did not move or speak. She was standing, he knew, by the hearth, just as she had stood a fortnight ago in the drawing-room, her arm against the mantelpiece. Then there had been a fire; now, the spring having come in earnest, there was none. She was quite still. She had the gift of stillness in a very unusual degree.

He took his hands from his face and brushed back his hair. He came over to her and stood, too, by the mantelpiece.

"So you see how it is with me," he said.

CHAPTER XVII

SHE would and she would not. She was Dear Lady Disdain of the pantomime song of thereabouts who "would n't say Yes" and who "would n't say No"; and Christopher, happy and unhappy, unhappy and happy, was heard and unanswered.

For him something enormous had happened — something to which his whole life, with everything that it held, had been leading. For her something had happened, too, but — or he fancied so — had happened as accidents happen. For him this something was from within; for her — and here was his deadly fear! — from without? But she did not repulse him.

It was difficult afterwards to know exactly how she avoided — if she did avoid! — committing herself in words. For she heard him out. He did not attempt to touch her as he spoke. Perhaps he knew that at that moment he could not have trusted himself even to take her hand. They stood a yard and a half apart and looked down, or looked at each other from time to time, and sometimes for moments together they looked into each other's eyes. She never tried to evade his look. He could have believed that, if she did not understand, she was trying to. She had the virginal look at such times that was part of her extraordinary charm. He could have thrown himself at her feet as he saw it, and clasped her about the knees, hiding his face in her skirt.

"You knew I loved you," he said.

"I thought you were going to."

"I've loved you ever since the day I saw you at the station. Before that, I think, myself. Since that, all the time. Something must have reached you from me. That

day, the day I first saw you, — were n't you conscious of something?"

"I've told you that I was."

"But later. In the night."

She shook her head — and even as she did so arrested the movement.

"In the night?"

She looked at him now as if she saw past him.

"I — I do remember," she said.

"What?"

"I could n't sleep. I always sleep. That's why I remember. I could n't that night. We were at Brussels. I could hear the noises in the streets, but it was n't that. It was as if I were not being allowed to sleep. As if I were being kept awake. How odd that you should ask me about that night. One of the few *nuits blanches* in my life."

A glow came into his face.

"I — you'll think it ridiculous — I believe I kept you awake."

"You?"

"I believe so."

"How could you?"

"I was trying to."

"To keep me awake? In Brussels? From here, do you mean? From London?"

"From Jermyn Street, to be exact. I had rooms there, then. I did n't think distance would make any difference. I did n't know where you were. I did n't think that would make any difference either. I wanted to get a thought through to you, wherever you were. It was the only way I could communicate with you — if it was a way. I wanted so badly to communicate with you, even then. If 'it' — what I told you — was You, I thought I should get a thought through. I believed that by battering you with thoughts — that's the way I expressed it to myself, I remember — I might hope to, anyway." He faced her steadily, and she as steadily faced him. "Did I?"

"I don't know. I think I may have thought of you. But then, you see, I could n't sleep. It would be probable that I should think of all that had happened in the day. One does when one is travelling. The mind's eye is full of images then. The odd thing is that I should n't have slept . . ."

"'Battering' me with thoughts—" she said after a moment or two. "But it was rather like that — I mean that I can conceive that if it were possible to be conscious of such a thing —"

She did not finish her sentence.

"You see," he said.

To him the proof was positive.

She was again the mysterious companion of his dreams — the "long-expected come at last." For the moment, in the strangeness of this further discovery, he lost sight of the other Cora who had the power to hurt him so grievously. He forgot even that it was this other Cora who had brought him back to the first. He remembered presently, and deliberately put the thought away from him. He may have recognised that the other Cora was not without an appeal for him. He had always known that there was something in her appearance which she shared with strange types.

"What are you going to say to me?" he said at length.

"What do you want me to say to you?"

It was almost what she had said before.

"You know what I want to hear you say," he said. "If you can say it! Oh, if you could! But what I want is n't the point. It's what you feel that matters."

He came a little nearer to her, but still did not touch her.

"Do you think you could care for me, or come to care for me, enough to marry me? Not at once, perhaps not for some time. I've waited so long — I anyway believe myself to have waited so long! — that I'm prepared to go on waiting. But I want to know that there is you at the end of my waiting. I don't suppose you could ever know what it would be to me to know that."

She did not speak for a moment or two.

"You seem so sure that I am the right person," she said then.

"I am sure."

"I am not sure that I am."

"Sure? — or the right person?"

"Either."

Again there was a pause.

"Or," she added, "even if I should be, that you are."

Ah, Christopher felt, that was another question. It was also, however, what he wanted to know.

He had to go without knowing, nevertheless. For now the door did open, and Mrs. Constaple, back from her drive, her arms full of little dogs, put her head in.

If she thought at all, she must have thought that Christopher and Cora were generally to be discovered upon opposite sides of a hearth, talking or not talking, rather earnestly.

But it was, Don't move, Mr. Herrick, for she was not going to stop. She wanted to get her hat off, and was late for her rest before dinner, and how had the party gone?

It had all gone, Christopher said, but himself.

Mrs. Constaple wished she could have been there.

"And Margot Heccadon? Did she sing?"

"Like an angel," Cora said.

That was just how Mrs. Heccadon did sing, was n't it, Mr. Herrick? And good-bye to him. He was not to stir.

She shook up her dogs and disappeared.

But it was a break, and Christopher felt he must go.

Cora had n't answered him. He tried to get back to what they had been saying before the interruption, but he could not. He believed that Cora tried, too, or that, at any rate, she did not try to prevent his doing so.

"When shall I see you again?" he said desperately.

"Sunday?"

"I can't wait till Sunday."

She thought for a moment or two.

"We're going to parties and things most days. Are n't you? Don't you go to things? Where are you going to-night?"

Christopher thought of a little stack of cards on his table. He had been neglecting them.

"I believe I've got a dance to-night somewhere. Yes, a Lady Something in Park Street."

"Lady Reigate's. We're going there. Do come. Will you?"

"Of course I will."

"We may be a little late. We're going to a concert first — but only round the corner in Brook Street. I'll see that Mrs. Constaple does n't stop there too long."

"Till to-night, then," said Christopher.

"Till to-night," she echoed.

He tried to say something more, but could not find words.

"Till to-night," he said again.

No, she had not repulsed him.

He was in Park Street by a quarter to twelve.

Thenceforward, for a space, his life seemed to be lived to the tune, and the tunes, of dance-music. Dance-music never seemed to be quite out of his ears, nor the throbbing of floors. He was always, so it seemed now, arriving at lit-up awninged houses, and giving up his coat and hat, and making the slow ascent of crowded staircases, and being announced, and shaking hands with a tiara and a bouquet, and two tall ivy-wreaths or rose-wreaths (the reign of the tall girl was beginning), and passing on into crowded rooms where the band of the moment was playing the tunes which pulsed in his ears all day long. And he was always looking for one face amongst the faces. He made many friends, and, inevitably, a few enemies. These were the days of Christopher's ball-dancing.

And, as he was always arriving and pushing his way through crowds, and looking round, and dancing, or not dancing, and eating, and not hungry enough to eat, hot quails or cutlets or devilled[1] chicken and expensive fruit, — the early peach, the forced or first strawberry, — so he seemed always to be going on somewhere else, to precisely similar conditions and doings. It was all very delightful, and he enjoyed or thought he enjoyed it. The cards came tumbling in. He looked upon them as so many lottery tickets, by the use of which he might draw or not draw the sight of Cora. Often it was no more than the sight of her, for not always could the disposal of their evenings take them in the same direction; and very often he drew blanks. An evening, at this time, was an evening gained or lost to him, according as it held or did not hold Cora.

She had not answered him. He could scarcely have told how it came that she had not answered him. She had never definitely refused to answer him, and she had never repulsed him. She always heard him — heard him gladly even. She always seemed glad to see him, and she would always dance with him. Whoever went without dances, it was never Christopher. In his utmost jealousy he could never say that she refused him what she gave to others. She called him Christopher and he called her Cora. But she just did not answer.

So things went on, Christopher doing no work nor attempting to do any. His ink-bottle would lose its power of speech altogether, if he were not careful. His days like his nights were full. There were a hundred pleasant (yet always disappointing) calls upon his time. He idled with the idlest — spent mornings and afternoons doing nothing. Riding in the Park in the afternoon was going out then, but — the motor had not come yet to rout the horses — all who had carriages drove there in those days. You hung over the railings and you took off your hat.

Christopher would watch for one carriage amongst the carriages, which were so thick on the drive that you could have crossed it walking on the backs of the horses. Every now and then the procession would be held up, and accumulations of people afoot would get from one side of the road to the other. Or a more distinguished sort of holding-up would be observed, and there would be a flutter, and a mounted policeman would appear, heralding the driving of the Queen herself, or the Princess of Wales. But it was not a royal carriage which Christopher watched for.

He would see it and lose it again in the throng. Sometimes he would be seen by one or other of its occupants, and he would get a cordial nod and smile; or perhaps he would be beckoned to, and would be picked up and driven, too, sitting opposite to Cora, if possible, and remembering always (with the knowledge hugged tight that he could call her Cora!) to address her as Miss St. Jemison. Or he would see the carriage draw up near the Achilles statue, and Mrs. Constaple and Cora would get out, to sit for an hour on green chairs in the Row, where — the lawns not yet discovered — it was the fashion to sit then, before hurrying off to dress for dinner. Here Christopher, a tall slim figure in rigorous London clothes, would join them.

He lunched and dined often in Grosvenor Street. He was a usefully unattached male, and Mrs. Constaple in want of a man would say, "Oh, write and ask Christopher Herrick," or "I'll send young Herrick a wire," or "Remind me, if we see him, to ask him if he can come with us to the So-and-So's on such-and-such a day. I promised to bring a man."

So most days they met — often more than once; and Christopher still was unanswered.

CHAPTER XVIII

BUT though the days went by and Cora kept him marking time, Christopher, to his continued surprise, did not for a moment lose the feeling that things were still moving for him, and even moving quickly. It was a little disturbing, this feeling, for, so far as he could see, nothing was moving at all except the days, which were hurrying him towards Whitsuntide. It was quite suddenly, one day, that he knew that it was towards this very period — the time dedicated by one body of people to holiday-making, and by another to a commemoration of the outpouring of the Spirit of God upon a handful of men in Judea, causing them to speak with tongues and to prophesy — that he and his affairs were being hurried with the days.

Something would happen then. He was sure of it — knew it; but there he paused. Why he should look to Whitsuntide for issues, unless that, making a break in the succession of the crowded days, it might be expected to break the continuity of other things also, he knew no more than he knew what it was that was to happen. Something, however, — of this he was persuaded; and with curious emotions, from which apprehension was not wholly absent, he saw the approach of the few days which would separate him from Cora.

To the recess itself, he had in any case been looking forward with mixed feelings of relief and regret. The strain of uncertainty was beginning to tell on him. He would not have admitted that he was tired, but he hoped in his heart, rather fervently, that it was that only — just rest that he wanted; and, more fervently still, he hoped that Cora wanted rest.

For surely there was something strange about Cora just

then. Was there any change in her? — any change, however impalpable? He could point to none. She was always delightful, always ready to talk to him, always ready to dance with him; but just sometimes — and most unjustifiably he connected the man he disliked with this — he found himself reminded, by some little look of hers or action, of the feeling which he had had when he parted with her after the memorable meeting in Sloane Street — the feeling that for some reason or other she wished the crowd to engulf her — to receive her, as has been said, out of his sight. Put into other words, though Christopher would not have put the thought into any, he was feeling that not all Cora's thinkings or doings were known to him. So, harassed and perplexed, he looked to the rest of the coming holiday to ease his own nerves and hers. It was nerves, of course, nothing but nerves.

Mr. St. Jemison was at Harrogate, where Cora was to join him. Christopher had accepted the thought of the three days' separation as inevitable. No alternative had suggested itself to him. But now, with the conviction that Whitsuntide was to be momentous, he conceived that the disposition of his own movements must be involved. From that, though he was expected at Herrickswood, it was only a step to the idea that perhaps it was intended by those powers, whatever they were, which seemed to decide his fate for him, that there should be no separation — that he should go to Harrogate too!

The thought sent him flying to Cora, whom he ran to earth in the Park. Without much difficulty he managed to detach her from Mrs. Constaple.

The thought of three days with her — away from the racket of the town — filled him with excitement.

"Do you know I've never walked with you?" he began, his eyes shining. If he had put his hands to his cheeks, as he did sometimes, he would have found them glowing.

"You often walk with me. You're walking with me now."

"On a path," said Christopher. "I meant the open country. Wind in your face. Perhaps rain."

All the walks that he had ever taken rose before him. He had a vision of gorse and broom and heather; of uplands and woods; of mossy hollows and lonely places; of twilights and nightfalls and nights; of ploughed fields and fields of corn; of straight avenues of trees, long white roads, — roads like white ribands winding through a valley or over hills, roads like the beds of streams.

"We're going to walk," he said.

"Oh!" said Cora.

"Walk," he repeated.

"Where?"

"We'll find walks. Where is there that one could n't? I've found walks in the Black Country. I remember a visit to a boy I was at school with, who lived in the heart of it. There was a black canal, with black mud on the towing paths, and tunnels — such wonderful tunnels. Oh, there'll be walks, right enough, where I mean. Cora, we're going for such walks!"

"Where do you mean?" she said. But she caught something of the glow of his ardour. "I should like to walk with you. I believe you're one of the few people one could walk with. Yes, I'm quite sure I could walk with you."

"Listen then, I'm coming to Harrogate. I can't imagine why I did n't think of it before. To another hotel, of course, but we'll spend long days together. It's there we're going to find the walks. Why did n't I think of it? It's all as easy as winking. I've only to write for a room somewhere, and there we are with the world before us. Three whole days. Think. Three whole days!"

Cora had turned startled eyes on him.

"But, Christopher, you can't," she said, as soon as she could get in a word. "You can't possibly."

"Why not?"

"It's out of the question."

"But why?"

"Out of the question," she repeated. One might have supposed her taken aback — without reasons ready.

"But, Cora, it is n't. I might have been going there anyway."

"You might, but you were n't. You were going to Herrickswood. Why should you change? And — and you forget: my father 's there."

Perhaps at the back of his mind it was because her father was at Harrogate that he believed he was to go there. If, as he was certain, Whitsuntide was to prove "momentous," is must surely be in connection with the announcing, and so the confirming, of their engagement. He wanted the thing sanctioned, settled. He wanted, in the character of the suitor, which he was, for Cora's hand, to see Cora's father, that he might see and might tell his own people; his mother — her message to him on the water had reached him, maybe? — his mother, with John Hemming, of course, — and his grandmother. There was always present to him the knowledge that there were three persons, in different parts of England, each of whom might with reason, though for reasons which varied, claim the right to information at first-hand.

"I know," he said.

"So, anyway, it would n't be any use. How could we go for those walks? When I walked, it would be with him."

"Why not tell him? He must be told sometime. Why not now?"

She knew how much he wished this. But she shook her head.

He did not urge her, knowing that she knew.

He did not tell her either that he was looking confidently to the happening of something — looking to the happening of anything. He bowed to her decision about her father, as he had tacitly bowed to it — or one like it — all along. But — really believing that he was to go to Harrogate — he did not see at once that it was this, and just this, that he was not to do.

"We could even travel up together!"

"No," she said firmly, "we could n't, for you're going to Herrickswood."

"Not unless you say so."

He was n't sure even yet.

"I do say so. You're going to Herrickswood."

He persisted for a few moments, impelled, now, rather by the thought of what the three days would mean to him, than by the idea of assisting fate in its workings. It was difficult to give up the pictured walks. But Cora, for some reason or other, did not wish him to go to Harrogate.

It was not to be Harrogate, then? If it was, she would relent. His faith unshaken though his spirits damped, he waited for a sign.

The week which ended the first half of the season was a very full one, and he and Cora met twice that evening. In Queen Street there was every facility for conversation, every inducement even — music: gold chairs in rows, and a hostess going about saying S-s-sh. But here by ill-luck Christopher, standing in a doorway, was divided from Cora by rows and rows of the talkative musical chairs. So Queen Street was drawn blank. Chesham Place, where a ball was in full swing when he got there, yielded nothing either. There Mrs. Constaple, knocked up by her exertions, stayed only about a quarter of an hour, and the one dance which Cora danced, she danced, not with Christopher, but with Heccadon. That evening, then, in addition to giving him no sign, was one of those which to Christopher counted for lost.

Nor was the next nor the next any better. Each of them held Cora, it is true, but a Cora who gave no sign, and each of them somehow held Heccadon . . .

If it was to be anywhere it was plainly to be Herrickswood; and to Herrickswood, while Cora journeyed to Harrogate, a Christopher, whose spirits alternated curiously

between depression and exaltation, took a despondent and expectant way.

Nothing could have been better for him than the atmosphere of the quiet old house. He was really tired, perhaps, by the life of these last few weeks, as well as strained by what he had been going through mentally and spiritually, as he lived it, and in the calm of the placid rooms and the sense of restfulness which pervaded it, he lost some of the apprehensions which had beset him. Fatima was there, moreover, and between her and his grandmother, he was kept talking and listening at a time when it was the best thing in the world for him to have to do both.

Would anything happen at Herrickswood? It seemed unlikely. But he was glad he had come. His grandmother wanted to hear of his doings, and seemed pleased to be told of the life he was leading. She had plenty to say.

"Yes, I sent in your name to two or three people. A word's useful here and there, though things are all pretty much changed, I fancy, since my day. Half the people you speak of *we 'd* never heard of. The Reigate woman I remember. She was plain Mrs. then, and he had as much chance of a peerage as his butler. The What's-their-names — Lord! is she still taking daughters out? You don't tell me so! The youngest must be an old woman. The Oakingtons — have you come across them? Lady Mary I knew very well at one time. She was a Cuthbridge — married her cousin. There was a ball at the Claverhouses, I hear. Were you there? And why not, pray?"

This was a life that she knew. This was a life that came into the Herrick code. You were expected to lead it. She had known every one of importance in her own day, and had an arrogant contempt for the new names.

She shook her head over a few of those she heard now.

"I should like, with a blue pencil, to go through a list of some of the houses that my grandson, it seems, is willing to go to — yes, with a good fat blue pencil."

"These are demi-democratic days, you see," said Ancebel-Fatima sagely, and wondered why Christopher, whom she believed herself to be championing, tweaked her pigtail affectionately and smiled.

Mrs. Herrick smiled too.

"They're demi-everything days, my dear. You've hit half your word to a nicety."

She pinched Fatima's cheek and returned to her argument.

"Jane Claverhouse goes to extremes and may be called a snob for her pains, but, upon my word, there's something to be said for a woman who keeps up the traditions. If more people had refused to open their doors so indecently wide, what we used to call society, and now don't call anything at all, would n't be in the poor state — which is the rich state, maybe! — that it's in now. It is n't hard to see how things are tending. People used to be in the world or out of it. Soon there'll be so many people in it, that there won't be any left to be out of it; and that will be the end of everything. Go to the Claverhouses when they ask you."

"They did n't ask me," said Christopher modestly.

"Oh, well, they will another time. I can promise you that. Go to that sort of house, and never mind your Reigates and MacGadarenes. Both houses are open to you, but not quite at the same time. You'll have to choose."

Christopher listened. He knew that the conditions to which his grandmother's philosophy applied were passing. The vision of Peter — reversed, perhaps — had been seen anew.

"I'm not at all sure that Margaret Constaple's the best Child's Guide for you, though I don't forget that it was I introduced you to her. She's too much infected with the modern spirit — was always ready to take — what's the girl's name? — Geraldine — anywhere where there was a candle or a cutlet, and I hear she's taking out St. Jemi-

son's daughter this year. Why can't the woman sit still? What's *she* like, by the way?"

"Miss St. Jemison?"

Now was it coming? Was this the beginning? He looked up a little startled, and borrowed a phrase from Mrs. Constaple. He had not thought to hear himself asked to describe Cora, and was not prepared. She was very much admired, he said.

"So was her mother," said the old lady grimly.

But Christopher saw that this was not to prove, or even lead to, that which he awaited. There was nothing big with promise or warning in the moment, and he breathed again.

"Admired, is she?" said his grandmother, meanwhile. "Pretty? Well, she'll need to be."

"Why?" said Fatima, who wanted to know.

"Because!" said her grandmother-in-law oracularly.

But Christopher, assured that this was in no way connected with what he thought of to himself as "momentous," was not to be frightened by the prospect of a potential tussle. He knew his grandmother, and knew that a tussle of some sort must be expected. So when she went back to the subject, as she did presently, Fatima not being by, he did not attach too much importance to what she said. She talked more of Mrs. Constaple's inability to stay quietly at home than of the girl the chaperoning of whom was designed to cover it.

"She'll die in harness," she said. "She rackets about from pillar to post from morning till night. Always did. She'd dine in the refreshment-room at a railway station, I believe, rather than eat a meal at home. But she's a clever woman in her silly way. She married her own girl very well with nothing particular to recommend her — everything goes to the sons in that family — and I daresay she'll marry the St. Jemison girl. He'll be a brave man, for all that, Christopher, who marries *her* mother's daughter."

Christopher would have heard this with difficulty from any one else, but, coming from his grandmother, it was allowed to pass; as was the warning it contained, if indeed it contained one. He did not even say, "But she can't be responsible for her mother"; nor his grandmother the "Quite true," with which she would then probably have replied, "The point is, that what will always be remembered is not so much that, as that her mother is responsible for her."

So the matter dropped.

The next day was Sunday. Would it be then?

He woke to a sense of disappointment. Yet he had known that unless Cora had written before starting (as he had done), or posted a letter at some station on her way North, it was impossible that anything could reach him that morning. Why, then, did he look for what was not there? It was some sort of solace to him to think of her as receiving and reading a letter from him.

His grandmother did not go to church that morning, but when he and Fatima got back from their walk to the village, they found her in her pony-chair, waiting for them on the drive.

"I want you, Christopher. Yes, Ancebel can come too, if she cares to. Go on, Frederick" (to the groom at the pony's head). "Round by the lake and the kennels. I've been doing some planting, and I want to show you."

They started on a tour of inspection.

She had done considerable planting.

"And I've been looking to my fences."

She had rebuilt portions of the park wall, and was repairing her gates.

"Now the new cottages."

"Very good, 'm."

"New cottages?" said Christopher.

His grandmother nodded.

"There's always been a difficulty about housing the

men on the estate — the labourers, woodmen, hedgers and ditchers, and so forth. There are practically no cottages to be had about here. We've always had bothers about this — even in your grandfather's time, when men thought less than they do now of walking a mile or two to their work. Well, I did n't see why you should."

"I, Grandmother?"

"Anything that's done now is done for you, my dear."

He believed now that it was beginning indeed.

He was sitting with her the next evening in her sitting-room. Fatima and her governess had just retired for the night, and the two were alone. She had folded up her work and was ready to make a move, but had not moved; and Christopher believed that she had something to say.

"You'll be wanting to marry one of these days," was what she said when she spoke, and Christopher gave a little gasp, and knew that he was to know at last what the days had held for him. She was looking at the work which she held on her knees, and did not see the face which he turned towards her. She did not look at him, indeed, for a moment or two, but continued to gaze at her worsteds, prodding them absently with an ebony needle, and busy, it was evident, with her thoughts. "There was a time when I should have cried out at the suggestion of an early marriage for any young man with his way to make. But one lives and unlearns one's first wisdom. I need n't tell you that I've been thinking of Stephen. He's never out of my thoughts for very long. I've thought of all that we may have done, or left undone, in his case. Well, he thought himself in love when he was younger than you are, and he wanted to marry. Perhaps, if his father and I had not objected so successfully, things might not have turned out for him quite as they did. We had nothing against the girl. Our objection was that he was a boy. Who knows? He may have known what he needed — as the dog that eats grass. I'm not likening you to him. You're very differ-

ent from my poor good-for-nothing. You've outlets that he had n't. I can understand that. But you're flesh and blood, and I'm old enough, and have been young enough, to know what those stand for, and I don't want you to suffer unnecessarily."

She looked up now.

"Have you any one in your mind?" she said.

The question was shot at him. It took him unawares, and so, though he did not answer it, practically the question was not unanswered.

"I see. You don't choose to tell me."

"I can't, Grandmother. If I might choose, I should tell you this moment. And," he smiled, "I don't know that I have anything to tell."

"Well, if she's decent —"

"Grandmother!"

"If she's decent — I'll stick to my word, if you please —"

She was trying him with it, he saw.

"Well-born —"

He made no sign.

"Well-bred —"

He managed to preserve his silence.

"The right wife for you, the wife we should wish for you, the wife you should wish for yourself," she tried him with each of these, — "if she's all this, here's something that you can bear in mind."

He leaned forward a little, wondering what was coming.

"My time now may be short or it may be — not long, but prolonged. Whichever it may please God to make it, I don't intend my shoes to stand to you, Christopher, for dead men's. You're coming into Herrickswood one day, as you know. That's no reason, as I see things, why you should spend the best years of your life waiting. So, other things being equal, — but being equal, mind! — your marriage need not depend on my death. If you can satisfy me on certain general points, — or she can, whoever she

is! — it shall be made possible for you to marry whenever you want to. There! I don't want any thanks, dear. It's the purest selfishness. I don't pretend — to myself even — that it's anything else. Ring that bell for me — twice, please, for Ollenshaw — and now good-night to you."

She paused at the door.

"You're off to-morrow, I suppose?"

"But not in the morning."

"Well, I must n't keep you from her."

"You're so certain there's some one."

"If there is n't there ought to be. But quite certain, Christopher. I wish I was as certain that I should like her."

"If there should be any one — I'm not free to tell you, Grandmother, even if I knew — you would like her. You would n't be able to help liking her."

He wanted to say more, but might not; nor was he quite sure that it would have been the right moment to say more.

She kissed him, was met by her elderly maid at the foot of the stairs, and went up to bed.

This was one of the moments when Christopher felt breathless. He lost sight of all misgiving in the joy of the day's most wonderful bounty. A letter, moreover, on the Whit Monday, as upon that Easter Sunday which he would always remember, was in the pocket over his heart. A day had withheld, it seemed, that a day might give the more lavishly.

This, then, was why he had not been allowed to go to Harrogate! He had come to Herrickswood that he might hear what he had just heard. Cora, unconscious agent of the powers which watched over him, had sent him from her that he might be brought the more surely to her. For now he could go to her and ask for her answer. Now nothing hindered. By that time to-morrow Cora would be engaged to him. A few hours more, just a few hours more . . .

CHAPTER XIX

He himself was infected now with the spirit of haste by which he conceived the movement of his affairs to be inspired, and, though he had spoken of an afternoon train, he went back to London by a morning one. His grandmother, as in like circumstances his mother before her, made no comment. She saw him go, if not unregretfully, at least cheerfully, and rallied the protesting Fatima upon her lack of a similar ability to take things as they came.

"It's taking things as they go, I think," said Fatima. "He *said* after luncheon! He was to have come for a ride this morning. And he goes and leaves before ten! He's always going away from one — always."

"Then he must always be coming to you, my dear. A person can't go away from you if he has n't been with you."

"Oh, for two or three days — like this. Can't men ever be contented? Can't you ever keep them with you?"

"Only by letting them go," said Christopher's grandmother.

The subject of their discussion, meanwhile, was being hurried back to London as fast as the quickest train of the day could take him. He had bought an A B C at the station, and this he studied when he was not sitting forward in his seat as if to urge the train on, or moving restlessly in his compartment, which happily held no one but himself. He could not have borne, just then, the presence of other travellers. He looked out of the windows. The train could not go quickly enough for him. He urged it onward and onward, and every time that he relaxed his muscles, he came back to the study of the time-table.

He was to see Cora at the opera that evening, where he

was to join Mrs. Constaple in her box, but he was impatient of even so much delay, and he had determined to meet all the afternoon trains in from Harrogate on the chance of finding her in one of them. There was more than one route open to her, but she had travelled up by the Midland line, he knew, and he thought it probable that she would come back the same way. Arrived at Victoria, then, he sent his luggage on to Cloisters Street, and made for St. Pancras.

One train he had missed, but as this one started very early it was unlikely that she had come by it. He had time for some lunch before the next. He ate standing, and was on the platform twenty minutes before it was due.

It came in bravely. He watched it forge its way towards him to its appointed place. In a moment it had thrown open its doors and was disgorging its passengers.

Christopher, peering into every carriage, walked the length of it. He doubled back, raked the crowd with eager eyes, inserted himself into the groups gathering about the luggage vans; saw every soul leave the train.

There was an interval of two hours before the next, but that did not daunt him. He could always interest himself in streets, and he explored the neighbourhood — southward as far as Clerkenwell Green, passing and pausing in front of the old Sadlers Wells Theatre, whither, in the days of it, all London had journeyed to see the actor of the moment; northward, past the Angel, into Islington; thence, by Copenhagen Street and Caledonian Road, back through Pentonville.

He was at the station again half an hour too soon.

He saw his second train come in. But neither was Cora in this. As before, he searched from end to end, and from the first opening of the doors to the moment when the porters collected the newspapers. It was possible, of course, that in the crowd he might have overlooked her, but he did not think that he had done so, and he set himself to wait for the next. The third train that he met would bring her.

He set his face towards the third train.

The last of the passengers, those who had been late in finding their luggage, or in securing porters, or who, for what other cause that may delay the arriving traveller, had been delayed, were leaving the platform. Christopher, overtaking the procession of these, became aware suddenly of a figure amongst them which was familiar to him. He knew that strong, well-built form. For no reason that he could have put into words, he wished that the man in front of him had been any other in the world than Heccadon.

But he would not let the chance sight of this man affect him. What was he to — Heccadon, or Heccadon to him, that a reminder of his existence should threaten even to damp his excitement? The thing should not be! He would not remember what he had put resolutely from him. With Cora's letter over his heart, he would not! With what he had to tell her burning within him to be told, he would not! Everything was bringing him to Cora; everything bringing Cora to him. Nothing should dash his hopes in these charged and hurrying hours.

He saw Heccadon get into his waiting hansom and drive off.

He drew a long breath. That was over. He pushed it from him . . .

His excitement increased now. Was there a thought under it, a suspicion, a deadly fear — something that he would not face?

How he hated this man! He did not know that he had ever hated any one as he hated him. He did not know that he hated any one else at all. But, again, away with all thought of him!

This was the shortest of the three waits; he found it the longest. Strive as he would, he could not keep the thought of the man wholly out of his mind. Why, on this day of all days, must Heccadon obtrude himself upon his conscious-

ness? The handsome cynical face and the strong shapely figure forced themselves upon his recollection. Something that Cora had said of him, too, would not be forgotten. He had not known at the moment who it was that she was speaking of, but he had known that, even in his ignorance, her words had the power to hurt him. What she had said was true in its horrible way. If Christopher, who hated Heccadon, could believe that it was true, it must be. Heccadon was the more dangerous.

He could not fill up the interval between the trains! He walked away from the station, and, unable to trust himself out of sight of it, or to trust it out of his sight, was back at its gates in half an hour. He started out afresh, and again returned like the dove to the ark. He, too, could find elsewhere no rest for the sole of his foot. So, chafing, he counted the minutes. Before, he had enjoyed the suspense of the waiting. Now waiting seemed intolerable.

The counted minutes dragged by. Presently he learned that the train would even be late. He questioned the porters, who began now to be aware of him, and to comment upon him amongst themselves.

The train was a quarter of an hour overdue when at last it came in. But it brought Cora. The carriage which held her stopped almost opposite to where he was standing.

He saw her before she saw him. She was scanning the prople on the platform, almost, he thought, as if she had expected that there might be some one to meet her. Well, there was. He slipped over to her and appeared to her — — saw himself appear to her — as she twice had appeared to him, suddenly, but gradually also.

She looked for a moment as if she doubted her eyes.

"Christopher?" she said. "You?" — as if she might be saying, "Are you sure?" and then smiled.

"You came up out of the ground," she said. She seemed to be explaining.

"I thought I'd meet you. I was sure you'd come by this train."

"I nearly did n't," she said, but he became conscious at this moment of the presence of her maid in the carriage behind her, and he did not, at the time, notice these words as they fell from her. He helped her to alight and waited to speak again till her maid should be gone for her luggage.

Cora, following her with her eyes, outstripped her, and then looked along the platform in the other direction. This he did notice, without attaching any significance to it.

"I could n't wait till to-night," he was saying. "I wanted to see you so desperately, and I've something to tell you. Something's happened."

Her eyes came back to him at that.

"Oh, nothing bad. Something that may be very good; that may make a difference. Cora, are you glad to see me? It's three days — more than three days since we saw each other. I don't know, now that I see you again, how I've got through them."

Her eyes were not wandering now.

"There has n't been a moment in them when you've been out of my thoughts."

"What have you to tell me?" she said.

"I can't tell you here. We can't talk in this crowd. I forgot about your maid. I thought I'd drive you to Grosvenor Street, or anyway drive with you part of the way. Yes, and that's still what I must do. I'm going to tell your maid to follow with your things."

He did not wait for permission, but was hurrying away when she called him.

"Stay," she said. "I'll speak to her." But she seemed to hesitate.

"Mrs. Constaple would n't mind? You're not thinking of that!"

"Oh, she would n't mind. I should probably tell her."

"What is it, then? Is it — ?" he looked in the direction of her maid. "Is n't she to be trusted?"

"Robson? Oh, she's all right."

"Then, tell her. I'll get a hansom."

Cora looked up and down the platform again.

"Very well," she said, after a moment.

When she joined him, a couple of minutes later, all trace of hesitation had vanished.

They got into the hansom, and he gave the driver the address.

Now was his waiting rewarded! Now might time be stayed! Now might distance prolong itself!

"Oh, Cora!" he said, when at last he found himself alone with her. "Oh, Cora . . ."

Her hand was lying in her lap. He put his hand over it. She did not draw it away.

"Do you care so much?" she said.

"More than I can tell you. More than you could know if I were able to tell you. I've never been quite alone with you before. I've never been so near to you before. Have you seen how I've kept myself from you? I've never held your hand as I'm holding it now. There have been times when I could have cried out . . ."

He broke off and looked from the hand which he clasped in his to her face.

"I've never kissed you," he said.

There were tears in his eyes.

They drove for some yards in silence. They were out of the open road now, and in the noise of streets. Here every second house was a boarding-house. Through dining-room windows you might see dreary tables laid for dinner. Christopher saw that they were dreary and looked away from them quickly.

Cora laid her other hand for one moment on his hand.

"Oh, I wish —" she began, but she did not say what it was that she wished.

He remembered her action and her words afterwards.

"*I* wish," was what he said then.

"Yes, Christopher?"

It was so wonderful when she called him by his name.

"That I could be sure of something."

"Say it."

"You've never told me that you care for me. Never in words. Can you, Cora? Oh, if I could make you know."

"You do make me know. That's it. You make me know so extraordinarily. If you were like other people I should know what to say to you. I'm half afraid of you."

"Afraid of me?"

"Because I'm not a bit what you think me."

"You don't see me as I really am," she continued after a moment's pause. "You see some one that you create, yourself — not me at all."

"How can that be?"

"I don't know. It just is," said Cora.

A few more of the precious yards were driven in silence.

"What have you to tell me?" she asked then.

They seemed to have lost sight of what it was that had brought him to meet her.

He told her of the talk with his grandmother. Words tripped themselves up on his tongue in his eagerness.

"She promises me Herrickswood," he said, "and tells me that I need n't wait."

Oxford Circus! They were getting so near now. Five minutes would see them at their destination. The pace was dreadful. Yet it seemed of a piece with that at which everything, just then, appeared to be moving for him.

"I'm going to tell him to drive round by Park Lane," Christopher said shortly.

"Robson will be home before we are."

"I can't help that. I'm going to tell him."

"Very well," said Cora, as before.

He gave his directions through the trap.

They had ten minutes more.

As they passed the top of Bond Street, Christopher was saying, "Cora, do you care for me? Once for all, do you care for me?"

At the corner of Wood Street, Cora was gaining time with "Should I be here if I did n't?"

Then a small thing happened.

A hansom turned out of South Molton Street, and in the press of the traffic was held up for a moment beside theirs. Its occupant, a man, any man, a stranger, looking at Christopher's companion, looked again. That was all. But it was enough. The blood went with a rush to Christopher's head. He turned on her choking with passion.

"People look at you," he said in a strangled voice. "Men — in the street — and you let them."

"How can I prevent them?"

"You don't want to prevent them. You want them to look at you. You mean them to look at you."

Something in the words as he spoke them arrested him. Recently, quite, quite recently, he had heard words like these. In a moment Mrs. Heccadon's rag of a face had risen before him, but its eyes were burning now with accusing fires, and he heard, not a sweet, husky voice singing love-songs, but a voice strangled like his own, made husky, made dreadful with passion.

"Heccadon," he heard himself saying, "Heccadon!" and saw her look at him. But he saw more than this, and heard more than his own voice and the husky voice of the singer.

For without warning (though presaged by who should say what processes of unconscious thought, what things noted and unnoted, what misgivings and apprehensions and doubts?) the gates had been rolled back and there was again for him one of those sudden open hours such as, on the night following his first vision of Cora, had laid bare to him all that was happening in monstrous London — one of the open hours in which, sight and hearing miraculously cleared, he knew that he saw and heard true! Through a mist, as it were, or as in a glass darkly, he now saw Cora searching the platform as he himself had searched it, and saw again her look of surprise as her

doubting eyes realised first his presence and then his identity; perceived her hesitation; heard the three words which, falling from her, had at the time escaped his notice. And, his eyes and ears opened, that seeing he should see and understand, and hearing he should hear and interpret, he saw his mother and knew why he could not see Cora beside her; saw his grandmother and heard, as if for the first time, her proviso with her promise, — even to the word which she used and chose to stick to. "If she's . . ." He had shut his ears to it then. "If she's . . ." And she was n't! In this most terrible of "open" moments he knew that she was n't.

"Heccadon's been at Harrogate," he said, — "Heccadon! That's why you would n't let me go there with you. I met three trains to-day for the sight of you, and I saw him at the station. You missed the one he came by or I should have seen you together. Heccadon. Heccadon. Heccadon."

It was Cora, now, that he could not drive with — Cora whom he loved, for Heccadon whom he hated! He started up just as he had done before, and, the impulse as suddenly leaving him, her stillness perhaps restraining him, sank back as before into his seat.

She made no attempt to deny what he said, but her silence was not the silence of one who disdains to answer. She admitted, without anger because without shame, and without shame because — he saw it now — she was without love for him.

"He's not worth your little finger," she said presently and very gently; "not fit to black your boots for you. I know that. But he's — well, he's himself, and I'm myself, and we understand each other."

"I don't understand anything," said Christopher, "except that you seem to be telling me that you're not — not *You*." He passed over what he could not allow himself to believe that she was telling him. "Is that what you mean to tell me — what you mean me to understand?"

"It's better that you should understand. I'm not, Christopher." Again by the use of his name she wrung his heart. "I've always known that I was n't. I've wanted to think that I was, that's all. And neither are you meant for me. You've something — some odd power. You got your message through to me — whatever it was — to Brussels, so you must have. But if he called to me . . . ! Don't be afraid. He won't, and I should n't lose my head if he did. I was born later, you see, than poor mother. But if he did . . ." She closed her eyes for a moment and lay back in the hansom. She said all this without shame. There was something that was not ignoble in her frankness.

"Mrs. Heccadon?" he forced himself to say.

"Margot? She understands each of us. She understands herself, too. She is one of the people who are born to pay."

"As I am not," she added after a moment; and he knew that she was right.

This was the end. The ten minutes by which he had extended the drive had done for him. He no longer wanted to get out of the hansom, but he was conscious, under what he said or heard, of straining towards the moment when it should reach Mrs. Constaple's, and he should be alone.

They talked on in the few minutes that remained. Cora spoke again of her mother. Christopher remembered how he once had nearly spoken of her, and could have laughed. She spoke of his stepfather. He remembered, with a momentary feeling of resentment against John Hemming, how he himself had nearly spoken of him — as a link between them!

"You knew?" he said under his breath.

"Christopher!" She leant forward to look at him. "You did n't suppose that I did n't? You can't have thought that? You can't suppose I *don't* know?"

"I think I hoped you might n't know everything," he said.

"Is it possible that you thought I could escape knowing?

I've had to know. I don't blame any one particularly — least of all, my mother. I'm very good friends with her. I'm very good friends with her husband, who is *my* step-father, I suppose. I've been quite good friends with others of my — my stepfathers."

"But your father," said Christopher. Was there no one to watch over her?

"Oh, he does n't trouble himself. I daresay he knows. It's all unfair enough, anyway. *He* got the custody of me."

That put a finger on Christopher's childhood! That, whirling him back to the moment when he had first heard of her, almost wrung a cry from him. Everything did seem linked with everything else, and, as she slipped from him, all his life, all the things in his life, all his thoughts and hopes and ambitions, to have been, nay, to be, bound up with her.

"What shall I do without you?" he said.

"Do you think I shan't miss you, Christopher?"

They were turning into Grosvenor Street now. With a rush which overwhelmed him there came upon him a sense of what it was that had happened. Ages seemed to have passed between the beginning of this momentous drive and its dreadful finish.

"Cora, I can't give you up. You're everything to me. It will be like tearing out my heart if I lose you."

She was wiser than he.

"You would never have been allowed to marry me. Do you think I should ever have been admitted to Herrickswood? I think what you told me to-day — what Mrs. Herrick said about leaving you free to marry whom you liked — would have brought that home to me. You would have been cut out of Herrickswood, Christopher."

He knew it, even as she spoke; and wondered that he had not known it all along.

"I could have faced that," he said.

"I know. But it would have been foolish, and it would have been useless. We're not for each other. If there's

anything that I know at this moment, it's that. We're each of us just the one person in the world who is not for the other. It is n't quite all one way, either. You would n't be allowed to marry me, but — think this out, Christopher! — I should n't be allowed to marry you. We did n't make the tangle; the tangle's there, all the same."

"I'm the only one caught in it. I shall never be free any more."

"You'll be freer than you've ever been," Cora said. "I believe I'm hundreds of years older than you, and I know. All sorts of things that are in you will be free. Things imprisoned — but they won't be always. No one will ever know, but some day it will be to me — if they could know it — that people will owe their gratitude, for you, Christopher."

He had thought that she was not feeling anything, but he was wrong.

The house was in sight now.

"I can't go to — to the opera to-night. You'll tell Mrs. Constaple."

She nodded.

"Nor the things next week."

"All right, Christopher. I'll tell her. I — I shan't go myself."

"Cora."

"Yes."

"You were going to meet him the day you met me."

There was the briefest pause.

Then: "Yes, Christopher."

The tears were streaming down her face now, as his tears were streaming down his. The hansom drew up at the door. It was the very end. The boy and the girl, careless of whether they were seen or not, drew together and kissed, their tears mingling.

So it came that Christopher's rooms in Cloisters Street were Christopher's Gethsemane that night. To his young

agony, none the less real because it was very young, it was fitting that only the understanding walls and windows should be witness. One person only was to guess at it. This was John Hemming, who, advised by a surprising letter from Cora herself, came to see his stepson at once, and was stricken rather than struck by his appearance.

"Nothing that you can tell me?"

"No, John."

"Christopher, you won't hate me — God forgive me, I believe I'm in this — you don't hate me?"

"No, John, of course not. And you're not in it. No one is but she and I. There's nothing that you could have helped — nothing that any one could. What I wished could n't be, I see that already."

"That you should have fixed upon her! — of all the girls in the world!"

"Don't let my mother know," said Christopher. "Some day I may tell her."

But he did n't tell her then. Nor — though he knew that she waited for news — did he tell his grandmother. *She* heard sooner or later from Mrs. Constaple; and it was as well, perhaps, that he did not hear what she said. What she *said*, mark, for she too loved Christopher. If Cora had loved him, who knows but that he would have won Cora with Herrickswood?

But Cora St. Jemison did not love Christopher, and, in the scheme of his life, her mission was not to crown his love. She was in the scheme of it, for all that, as love was in the scheme of it, and sorrow, with rich compensations for sorrow: it was love-crowned, perhaps, — such love, anyway, as that which had possessed or even obsessed him, — which was not. Her mission was not-to-love Christopher.

He had been wrong then? She was not That One to whom the eternal question had been addressed — not the chosen companion who somewhen, as he had supposed, had travelled or was to travel beside him? Climbing the years — from Boulogne to London — he had been under

a delusion? He was to know, maybe, that he had been under a delusion. He was to know beyond all doubt, if so, that the delusion itself had been divine. Before this consummation, some suffering, perhaps. What of that? Could such knowledge come otherwise than by suffering?

Therefore let no one say that this book of him "ends badly"! The book of Christopher ends happily. He was to come by his voice, it is true, as the wife of Heccadon had come by hers. That the dumb should speak — is not that to end happily? His mother, perhaps, wishing for grandchildren rather than books, was to wonder; Trimmer, perhaps (childless for the sake of him!); no one else.

So, Cloisters Street, which in some sort was also Boulogne to him, before it went the way of all the beautiful old streets in the changing town — before the ruthless demolishment, that is (some ten years later), of what could never be replaced — was to see considerably more of him than his agony. It was to witness the neglected ink-bottle finding its voice again, and to see Christopher, the wings sprouting on his pen as he listened, able once more to hear it; it was to see the releasing of all the imprisoned things from the Boulogne to the London days, from even before the Boulogne days, — the Cheltenham days, the Ebury Street days, — who is to gainsay it? — the days on board ship, the very pre-natal days. It was to see Christopher, in fine, learn at length to express himself.

Happy? Unhappy? Happy — and by reason of Cora, worthless Cora, daughter of the Mrs. St. Jemison who could not be called upon, but also the White Girl of Christopher's adoration, and the You, yes, when all's said, and in howsoever different a sense from any contemplated by the seeker, the You, the ultimate *You* of his conscious and unconscious seeking.

THE END

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